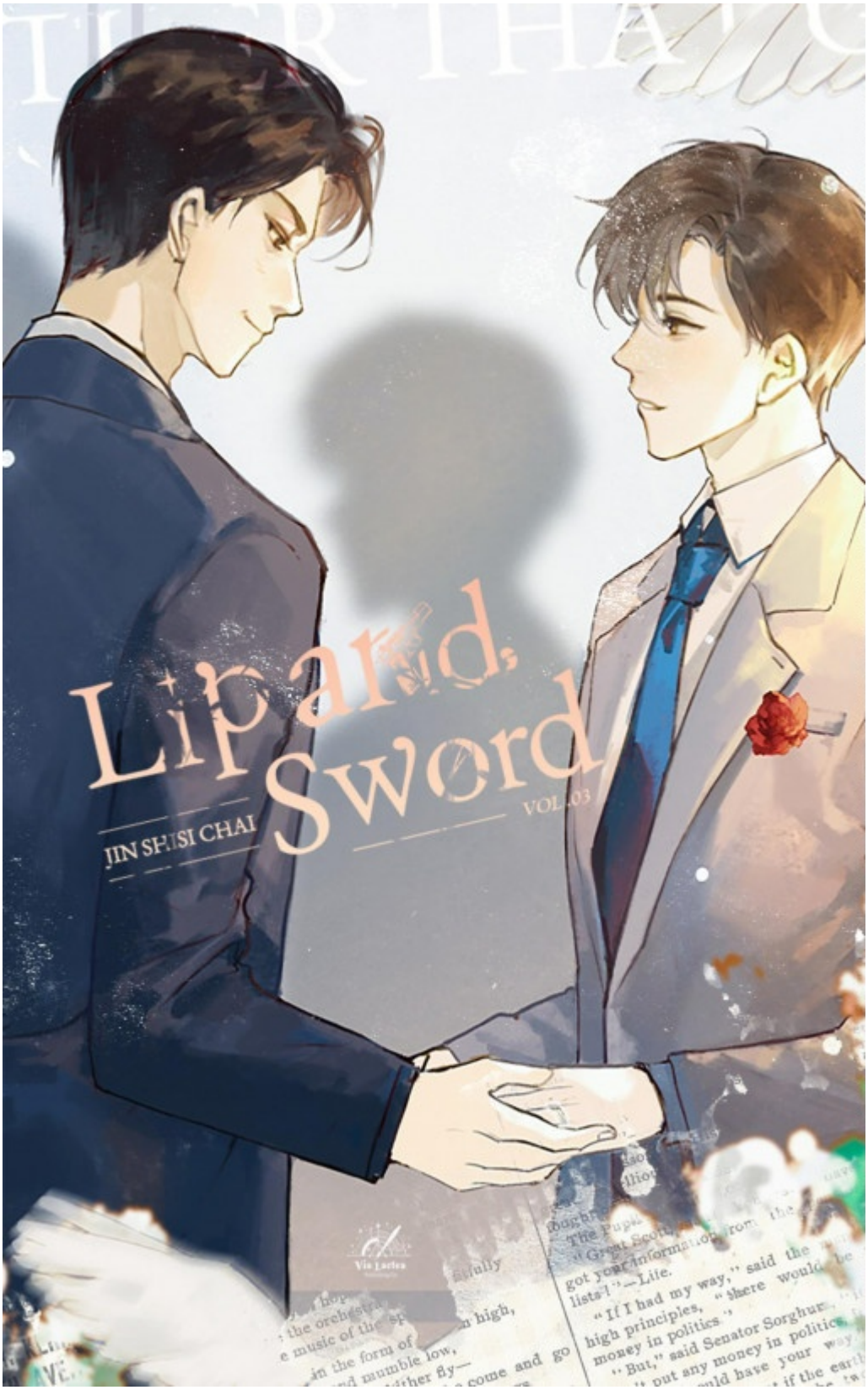
Lip and Sword
VOL.03
JIN SHISI CHAI

Lip and Sword

唇枪Vol.03

JIN SHISI CHAI/ 金十四钗

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SYNOPSIS

In order to find out the truth about his father's wrongful death in prison, med school graduate Xing Ming resolutely entered the news industry. With his dedication and commitment to pursuing journalism, he becomes a popular news anchor, known sometimes as an "Ice Prince." To clear his father's name and bring justice to his case, Xing Ming went so far as to sacrifice himself, clinging to influential and powerful people.

He hates Yu Zhongye's selfishness and indifference but has to accept his advice and help again and again. With Yu Zhongye's guidance, Xing Ming eventually grows into a professional journalist while also managing to keep the bottom line of reporting with integrity. As his show goes on, his life gradually unwinds, and the truth about his father's wrongful conviction gradually emerges…

But when he opened that final door, waiting for him was…

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Chapter 23

The Truth

Before he personally interacted with the host, Yu Shao'ai had the impression that Xing Ming was an arrogant and spoiled man with a rotten attitude. This was presumably due to the TV shows he hosted and the remarks other people said about him. A lone wolf like Xing Ming was assumed to neither get along with the others nor befriend people.

In America, he'd watched some critical and political news TV programs, and Yu Shao'ai had become a big fan of George Donaldson, a famous news reporter and anchor serving with ABC News. There was a similarity between Xing Ming's *Pearl Line* and Donaldson's shows. However, despite having the comparably cutting criticisms and decisive rebuffs, Xing Ming possessed much less sense of humor and composure. He always put on a sullen face when debating, and he always said his harsh words with the stiffest and most sarcastic tones. Like knives, his words were sharp but tactless, rigid and sometimes offensive.

But Ol' Lin thought highly of Xing Ming. Startlingly highly.

Ol' Lin was his father's faithful supporter and personal driver. He would always pick him up when he arrived home twice a year. They killed the time on the drive back from the airport by making small talk. As a typical follower of a man with great power, Ol' Lin was considerate and meticulous, and he never went against the will of his employer, just like those deathly loyal subjects of the ancient emperors.

Hence, Ol' Lin's opinion must mirror what Chairman Yu thought of Xing Ming.

They say, "Give a dog a bad name and hang him," and it was true. Pearl Station was a place where gossip tended to distort the truth, and rumors often marred good reputations. Crafty people with the intention of confusing wrong for right and bad for good loved saying things in a way that stood truth on its head. Yu Shao'ai had been hearing some of the exaggerated words in gossip, half right half wrong, from the Station.

Although his relationship with his father looked like one between a loving father and son, Yu Zhongye was more like a stranger to him. They rarely saw each other more than a few times a year. His father was the chairman of a state television station and a homosexual who preferred younger men. Nothing really bothered him about his father's sexual orientation, but waves of nausea always struck him every time he conjured up memories about his mother.

Overall, he felt resentment, disdain, and incomprehension toward his father.

But a bit of curiosity also lingered in his mind.

He wondered whether this man in front of him was his father's secret lover.

Liu Yanan was a big name around here. Up the mountain and down it, from the farming hamlets to the small town that governed this county, everyone knew her. Only, it was the type of notoriety that had people yelling and cursing whenever they saw her, as if seeing a rat on the streets.

Every reporter who'd swarmed her house to get a scoop had been rudely driven out the door by Liu Yanan as she brandished a broom. Xing Ming was the exception. Upon seeing him, she immediately said, "All grievances have causes and all debts have creditors. You are just the man I've been waiting for."

Liu Yanan opened the door wide as she spoke and smiled at him. The smile was cold and hostile, and Xing Ming had to brace himself to enter the house.

It had taken her a tremendous effort to repair her father's shanty house, the one that had been smashed by the villagers. Now it was clean, tidy, and simple, with blue-and-white striped bed sheets and curtains of the same color scheme. As Xing Ming wandered around this tiny place which couldn't be much more than a hundred square feet, he saw the certificates of merit and silk banners of recognition hanging on the wall. Dozens of years of time had made them worn out and stained. A gray-green gecko crawled, unmoving, near a crimson banner. It seemed dead.

The general atmosphere in this shabby place made him feel instinctively uncomfortable.

Liu Yanan looked slightly different from her initial appearance on *Pearl Line*. Now, she looked more masculine, with a skinny face and a bald head. Since the raging villagers always rushed to pull her hair when they saw her, she'd made the decision to shave off all her hair.

The spam comments in dark red during the *Oriental TV Line* live broadcast had been her "masterpiece," Liu Yanan admitted without prompting. As a college student who had worked in big cities, she was quite familiar with the Internet. By the time she saw her father getting slandered online, it had been too late to hurry home. Her first thought was to get on a television program to seek justice for him, which was why she decided to use the ghastly red comments; she wanted to redress the injustice that had been done to him.

Xing Ming could faintly see Liu Yanan's bright red gums when she spoke. Together with the ghastly paleness of her face, she was kind of frightening. Realizing the young men in front of her were both examining her, Liu Yanan explained that she had a canker sore lately.

Then three of them had gone to a small restaurant in the nearby town. Yu Shao'ai gobbled up the food despite being bad at using the bamboo chopsticks, but Xing Ming's utensils remained untouched, probably due to his mild germaphobia.

Liu Yanan gnawed on a mouthful of dried bamboo shoots, then said, "Reporters are all evil."

"I was once a reporter too," Xing Ming said, but didn't refute her claim.

Liu Yanan fixed her gaze on him for a moment then shook her head, saying, “You don’t look it.” After giving Yu Shao’ai a once-over, she affirmed, “I’ve never seen any reporter as handsome as you two.”

“How many reporters have you seen?”

“A *lot*. So many that I’m tired of them. I always kick them out.”

“Don’t you want to redress the grievances done to your father? Why didn’t you tell them?”

“I told them, but no one believed me.”

Honestly speaking, Xing Ming didn’t believe her either. Even now, he didn’t feel like he’d done anything wrong. Xing Ming pointed out to some pieces of evidence from the case and asked Liu Yanan to explain them.

“So how can you explain your father kissing a little girl on the lips in the video?”

Enjoying a piece of steamed pork belly, Liu Yanan retorted, “It was the first day of school for that kid. She was really scared. My father picked her up to comfort her, and so she returned the hug. Maybe that girl’s face got too close, which is why it looks like a kiss from your camera angle.”

Fair and reasonable or not, her explanation sounded plausible. Xing Ming frowned and said while lightly tapping his finger on the table, “But you know, there *are* two more families other than Zhang Yan and Zhang Ci who are accusing your father.”

The dirty, greasy tabletop was covered by a layer of dust, ash, and oil stains.

“So what? Is that so strange? Is it really any wonder they wanted to get in on this when they saw the Zhang family gaining profits from turning this into big news and getting on television?” As she spoke, pity and scorn appeared on Liu Yanan’s face, but, strangely enough, she didn’t seem to hold any hatred or resentment. “People think farmers and rural workers are kind and diligent, but that’s just a stereotype. Most of them turn out to be dim-witted and malicious.”

“But what about your older sister?” finally finished his feast, Yu Shao’ai asked on Xing Ming’s behalf. “Even Liu-*laoshi*’s own daughter accused him of being a pervert and pedophile. Why?”

“She has a hard time getting along with her in-laws. She thinks that Dad got millions from all the fundraising, and she wanted some of the money. Only, Dad never gave her any—”

“Yes, he did,” Xing Ming cut in. “The news reported that your older sister admitted to receiving a million from your father.”

Liu Yanan snorted. Then, with a mocking smile that revealed her dark red gums, she said, “She was lying. Her accusations of misappropriating donations and charity

funds were pure slander. Yes, my dad did give my sister some money for a house, but it wasn't misappropriated funds and it was also much less than a million yuan. It was my dad's savings from all these years of living frugally and collecting waste. It was just because my sister kept visiting the school and causing trouble by yelling about death threats or arson. She once said she'd poison each and every teacher and student there. My dad is an honest man, and moreover the troublemaker was his own daughter, so he just glossed over it, wanting everything to be peaceful. Calling the police on her probably never even crossed his mind. But I bet there're still people at the school who remember all of this. You can go and ask around, see if my older sister is this type of greedy, unfilial, good-for-nothing bitch."

However, it clearly wasn't difficult to pick a hole in Liu Yanan's words.

"Then what about the funds?" Xing Ming asked sharply, "In spite of the large amount of charity funds, and though you said there was no misappropriation, the facts are simple: Dong Li Elementary School's learning environment is still poor. Where did the money go?"

"The *money*? Yes, heard of it and saw it on tv but it was never received or put to use." Liu Yanan explained, "Eight or nine years ago, my dad was awarded by the annual Touching China program and a large-scale philanthropic fundraiser was led by the local Red Cross Committee of China right afterwards. Millions of funds in those days were worth a lot more than they are today. But, because of the corruption within the Red Cross and the local government, the school only received a few school uniforms, desks, daily necessities and a hundred thousand yuan in cash—ah, forgot to mention, there were also dozens of very old and broken computers."

Grim-faced, Xing Ming nodded, "It's very common for charitable organizations play dirty tricks like charity fraud and bribery. Theft of donations, surcharging donation items, secret contracts, and false invoices… there're chances for embezzlement everywhere in the process."

"There were some nongovernmental charity events on and off afterwards, yet it was just a drop in the bucket for a school that can barely collect tuition fees from the students' parents." Liu Yanan nodded back.

Xing Ming was slightly stunned, "You didn't mention a word about it to the reporters?"

"Who would believe me? The photos of my father taking the giant printed red cheque from the vice president of the Red Cross and shaking hands with the municipal leader had been circulating on newspapers and TV. Isn't it suspicious if you bite the hands that feeds you and claim not to have gotten the money after all these years?" After guzzling half a bowl of the oily soup, Liu Yanan raised her head again and continued talking, "By the way, the vice president of the Red Cross has been enjoying a successful life and the municipal leader who shook hands with my father has also been promoted to the provincial level. They are heavy hitters now."

It was a simple matter to redress an injustice for an average citizen who was falsely accused of sexual assault, however, the issue of Liu Chongqi no longer just involved the Zhang family or the Liu family, and, after the exaggeration of the story

in Luo You's *Pearl Line*, the situation was completely out of control.

Xing Ming knew that things had gotten more complicated, but calmly asked, "Why should I believe you?"

She asked in return, "Why shouldn't you?"

Xing Ming sank into silence.

Liu Yanan shrugged her shoulders and finally put down the chopsticks once she finished the last sip of the soup. Then she said, "Well, it's your choice whether or not you want to believe it. If you want, you can continue your investigation. With no solid evidence, I can't prove my dad isn't to blame for this case, let alone for embezzling charitable funds years ago."

Indeed, none of the journalists had chosen to believe her, no matter how hard she tried to explain. There was no proof.

Not only did the journalists not believe Liu Yanan's words, like hyenas chasing their prey, they were drawn to digging out her family's scandals. After a few short days, they had unearthed the divorce case with her ex-husband and the custody battle for her son. She'd also gone to the psychiatric unit of the hospital three years agon.

Now everyone in the county was saying that she had a relapse in mental illness. Some media outlets were even portraying her as a lunatic. One tabloid reporter had even chased after her to ask: "Were your mental health issues caused by childhood trauma from being sexually abused by your father?"

Overnight, a hero had been knocked off his pedestal and turned into a lowlife. The masses cursed him and scorned him. His reputation would never recover.

People labelled him as a filthy criminal, lecherous bastard, and hypocritical liar.

Finally, she said, "Actually, this all began when all you media people started stirring up the public. A few times my dad even told me that he couldn't do it anymore. He's almost *eighty*, and he still collects waste and trash for re-selling. He was considering giving up, retiring and enjoying his last years in peace. But it was you guys who brought him on TV, exposed his deeds to the public and crowned him as a '*hero*,' preventing him from turning his back on his charity work."

Xing Ming remained silent, his heartbeats quickening. He had to concede that she was right. Indeed, there were problems with some of—or frankly speaking, most of—the journalists and media reporters in the present day. Given the fickle quality of news reporting and the blind pursuit of sensationalism, they were excessively radical and yet fed on their own vanity. While they used their utmost efforts to shape a so-called hero, they also rejoiced at the downfall of these heroes.

It was all so similar to that dark period of his own past.

But he was doomed to be complicit in it all.

Chapter 24

Sacrifice and Revenge

Back at the Station, everyone was preparing for the live broadcast, including Xiang Xiaobo, who seemed to be quite well-behaved this time as he'd even shown up early and gone backstage. The production team of the TV program decided to arrange a place for him behind the door so that the audience could see his silhouette cast by the stage lights rather than his actual appearance. They did this for the safety of Xiang Xiaobo since, even though he was the main subject of tonight's TV show, these illegal businesses were involved with loan sharks, the enforcement of repaying debts, and an open underground casino, which had some close connections with the mafia-like gangs.

The well-organized TV show proceeded successfully just as Xing Ming predicted. The stories were told exactly how the scripts were written and there were no special skills or improvised performances that Xing Ming needed to bring into play.

When the live broadcast ended, Ruan Ning started his tiresome chattering about how the ratings should be high for this latest episode. Xing Ming however wasn't in the mood to pay attention to the ratings because he had now deeply understood its side effects. Ratings were the "root of evil" that had spurred he and Luo You to strive for credit while they competed with each other and were scrambling to win the favor of the "great emperor"—the chairman of Pearl Station. Any success was at the cost of incriminating an experienced teacher who had devoted his thirty years to teaching to a village in desperate poverty; now any regrets were of no avail.

Xing Ming owed Liu Chongqi a chance to clear his name. He should give an account on the truth of this story to the billions of viewers in this country.

A few useful videos of the police reclaiming the streets and cracking down on the gangs in the casino were taken after the reporters followed Xiang Xiaobo for a whole day on Wednesday. The final version of the video after cutting and editing had some parts removed because of the privacy protection on special weapons and tactics used by police. Xing Ming told the team to keep the rough cut and the footage which had been taken by reporters at great risk to their lives on the off chance that one day they might make use of these materials in a retrospective follow-up episode.

Not leaving immediately after the TV show was over, Xiang Xiaobo stayed and waited for Xing Ming to lend him more money so that he could gamble at another casino. However, when he heard Xing Ming assigning work to his staff members, his unease started growing. He abruptly interrupted with, "You said you have to protect the privacy of the SWAT team, but what about my security? Does anyone care?"

Xing Ming turned to look Xiang Xiaobo up and down with a poker face. After a short moment, his lips perked up and he said, "Whoops, a reporter working the field

accidently let your name and identity slip. Now every person in that casino knows that you're the informant."

His blank face had made Xiang Xiaobo panic, let alone the sudden smile. Vexed and stressed out, Xiang Xiaobo shouted, "You said I'd be fine after I went on TV because the cops cracked down on the casino!"

"Only an idiot would trust what I said. 'Cracking down on crime' is just an idealistic goal. Someone big has to stay behind such a large-scale casino. And even if there wasn't anyone, you know that the power of the police is sometimes limited. A few of the offenders may be left out by mistake like a fish that escapes through a net." Xing Ming said dryly.

Although a number of staff and audience members remained in the studio, Xiang Xiaobo still grabbed Xing Ming's collar and asked while the color quickly drained from his face, "Bitch, are you playing with me?"

The Xing Ming of today was much taller than Xiang Xiaobo. He swept his hands away and said, "Be careful around strangers when you're outside and never go to places like casinos or red-light districts. Gangs are everywhere in those places. Keep your little life safe."

After thinking for a while, Xiang Xiaobo gave up his attempt to beat Xing Ming, but instead decided to smash the equipment in the studio.

The people around shrieked in fright, and they barely had time to stop Xiang Xiaobo. Xing Ming maintained an expressionless face and said calmly, "You hit it and you pay for it. That's from Germany, two hundred thousand in total."

Finding no way of venting his anger, Xiang Xiaobo finally ranted, "Who the fuck do you think you are! You're even more of a slut than your fucking mom!" Without receiving any response from Xing Ming, he became even more provocative, pointing a rude finger right at his nose and yelling at the onlookers, "Do you guys know how he became a TV host? He slept with your boss! Your boss even sent his driver to give me money!"

All the staff members still remaining exchanged glances. They knew who this guy was talking about. Rumors spread quickly in the Station, especially in recent times with the candidates for the nomination of the Golden Microphone Award. It was a choice between the two rookies with a fifty percent chance of winning for either side. However, considering that Luo You existed, how could Xing Ming have stood half a chance? There had to be something strange going on.

Human beings were weird kinds of conflicting creatures who were born with the instincts of kissing up, kicking down, and bullying. Any gossip about Chairman Yu and Host Luo, the boy born with a silver spoon in his mouth, the boy who had a nice-looking face on top of talent and wit, was merely acknowledged a quick laugh or a graceful joke. Who didn't have a romantic past with someone they favored? But if Xing Ming was the person the chairman had some affair with, then things were different.

What did Xing Ming have beside his pretty face? A foul little social climber who

only got to his position through the casting couch. A brazen soul that only did business the dirty way.

People all turned around and now everyone's eyes were fixed on him in a rather strange and ambivalent state of atmosphere.

But the face they saw was cold as ice and just as dispassionate as ever. There was no trace of anger or anything that the onlookers expected, Xing Ming managed his feelings well.

The security guard soon arrived, grabbed Xiang Xiaobo by the collar, and threw him out.

"Ming-Ming." He heard someone calling him from behind.

When Xing Ming turned around, he saw Xiang Yong and called out to him, "Xiang-*shu*." He had come to the studio too, sitting there amongst the audience.

As always, he had evidently been worried about his biological son.

Xing Ming's memories about the Xiang family began when he and his mother moved into the Xiang household. At the very beginning, he'd tried to fight against his stepbrother, the bastard who had always bullied him. He waved his fists around but usually couldn't win. Every time Xiang Yong happened to find them grappling with each other, he would rush to slap Xiang Xiaobo on the face without asking for the reason behind the conflict.

Once, after such a scene, Xiang Yong had brought back a big bowl of Chinese Braised Lamb from the hotel as an apology to Xing Ming, to maybe placate his grievances. However, Xing Ming at that time had been a skinny boy in desperate need of bulking up, for he didn't like eating meat. In fact, he had found lamb to be especially intolerable—literally so, as he was allergic. A simple touch would cause him to develop rashes all over his body.

At the dining table, Xiang Yong knocked away his own son's chopsticks as they tried to reach the bowl of braised lamb. "You dared to bully your younger brother. No food tonight!" he scolded.

His son was staring and drooling at the steaming bowl of braised lamb, but Xiang Yong ignored him, choosing instead to pass a piece of lamb to Xing Ming's bowl.

Xing Ming smiled and thanked him, then, silently, wolfed down the food.

He had said before, more than once, that he was allergic to lamb, but Xiang Yong never remembered.

The person who actually liked lamb was Xiang Yong's real son.

Later that night when Xiang Yong thought Xing Ming was already deep in his dreams, he snuck over to wake Xiang Xiaobo up, who had been so hungry that he'd gone to bed early to escape his complaining stomach. Xiang Yong put the rest of the

food into the microwave, heated it, and then shared it with his son one bite at a time.

But it was actually a sleepless night for Xing Ming. He felt too itchy to sleep, so he scooched down to a corner of the bed, hugged his arms around himself, and scratched his skin. Red bloody streaks covered his arms. The gamey smell of the lamb was perceptible even through the door, and it made him feel even itchier.

He smelled that gamey scent, and he felt disgusted.

Therefore, later, he'd come up with an even more disgusting idea for revenge.

Xing Ming knew that he'd had a prickly personality back then. He'd been a moody and rebellious kid, hostile towards anyone wanting to get close to him. But now, he had feelings of guilt toward Xiang Yong, guilt enough for himself and his mother combined. Perhaps, if Xiang Xiaobo had been less inclined towards rebellion against his parents, if he had had a better family life, maybe he wouldn't have turned out to be such a scoundrel.

Seeing Xiang Yong running to him with a worried face, he guessed that this father was concerned about his son's safety after hearing the conversation between him and Xiang Xiaobo.

"I was just bluffing. The reporter didn't leak your son's identity to anyone in the casino. I don't think he'll be going gambling for this little while, but I'm not sure how long he'll keep that up," Xing Ming said, comforting him.

Xiang Yong shook his head and said, "Your mother is leaving. Let's have a family dinner this weekend."

Xing Ming didn't want to eat a meal with Tang Wan, so he found an excuse, "Sorry but I've got work this weekend, so I probably won't have time."

Although his stepfather was getting on in his years, the humility and submission he'd previously shown Tang Wan and her son had strangely disappeared. He insisted, "Come back for a meal. We can get some drinks after that. Just you and me. I have something I should have told you long ago."

Xing Ming had a vague idea already of what Xiang Yong planned to tell him.

Way back when Xing Hong's daring words had resulted in his rape conviction, it would have been impossible for Tang Wan, as his wife, to have known nothing about it. It was just that she had kept her mouth shut and lips sealed for all these years.

As soon as he'd found Zhang Hongfei, who might have had some clues, the man had been reassigned to another province. The old, nearly-retired prison guard's job transfer had been issued abnormally quickly. Clearly, there was a group of people behind it who didn't want any little rats to mess with their game. Between the two parties wrestling here, it was "us" verses "them." The leaders who could have been exposed by his father were still in power. They weren't even very far away from him, watching him like hawks casting greedy eyes on their prey.

Before his last break up with his ex-girlfriend, they'd watched a movie together called *Sacrifice*, a historical drama directed by Chen Kaige. Xing Ming wasn't a moviegoer because bad movies always seemed to make it into theaters while the good ones were left behind. But *Sacrifice* was an exception that he particularly enjoyed.

In the movie, twenty years after the annihilation of his entire bloodline, the only surviving orphan finally grew up and took revenge as he slaughtered his sworn enemy with his own hands.

It was quite a good example of the idea "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

But his ex-girlfriend and most of the audience had complained afterwards, "Chen Kaige didn't do a good enough job. The script wasn't well-written, the pacing was off, and the artistic style didn't fit the normal aesthetics. Those philosophical theories and humanity related situations were nonsense. He was just giving us bullshit."

Only Xing Ming knew that it was simply an inspirational movie.

And what if something similar had happened to him?

The only answer he could think of was: *"Grin and endure."*

Standing by a crosswalk two blocks away from Pearl Station Garden, Xing Ming was staring at a convenience store across the street. Some colleagues he was still unacquainted with passed by and asked him if he was waiting for someone.

He nodded, nevertheless his mind seemed a bit lost. He had no idea who he was waiting for.

Yu Zhongye never made the promise that he was going to pick him up tonight, but when they bid farewell to each other in the afternoon, he had reminded him to attend the meeting in preparation for the Station's annual anniversary dinner party this weekend.

"I like you."

Xing Ming recalled the time when Chairman Yu had whispered that line in his ear. After doing an in-depth comparison of Chairman Yu's behavior from before and after the confession, he found that it was at least partially true.

But it was far from enough.

Lin Siquan was an example. So were the promises from those books of "hand in hand, with love to the end." Only, feelings and love were not something that could only be learned from books or other people's stories. He had yet to figure out their relationship. Perhaps it really was that Yu Zhongye wasn't giving him enough, or perhaps Xing Ming himself had lost too much, had lacked too much in his early life that now, he wanted too much.

Around seven to eight people went in and out of the convenience store within a

few minutes. They were the newcomers at the Station who often worked overtime and overnight on media production. After buying nighttime meals, they'd still need to go back in the office to keep working. After aimlessly waiting another five-to-six-minutes, Xing Ming saw a Bentley drive up and park in front of him.

Ol' Lin was driving in the front seat, and he was the only one in the car. He said he had called Xing Ming before setting off, yet no one picked up the phone. Thankfully he happened to meet him on the road to the Station. Ol' Lin even told him that Yu-*shu* would pick him up tonight.

Xing Ming's phone had been turned off during the live broadcast and due to his conflict with Xiang Xiaobo, it remained powered off until now. Taking a quick glance at the empty backseat, Xing Ming asked, "Where is *laoshi*?"

"Yu-*shu* has an event tonight. He may or may not be able to come back," Ol' Lin replied.

Which means that it wasn't a booty call when the boss wanted to pick him up tonight?

Which meant that Xing Ming being picked up wasn't a mere booty call. He asked uncertainly, "What… about Shao'ai?"

"He's gone to stay with his grandfather. He won't be back for the entire weekend."

Xing Ming thought it sounded pretty reasonable and got in the car. On their way home, Ol' Lin tried to start conversations with him. He got excited periodically and when he laughed and joked, he told Xing Ming that the chairman was really spoiling him. Ol' Lin mentioned that he was incredibly lucky to have gotten the precious opportunity to be the host of the annual anniversary show and the winner of the Golden Microphone Award. Xing Ming didn't want to hear it, so he gave perfunctory responses, obviously disinterested. After realizing that all his compliments had fallen on deaf ears, Ol' Lin wisely chose to shut up.

As Yu Shao'ai was now actually living at the house, Xing Ming didn't want to be a cuckoo bird taking up his bedroom. But he also didn't have the spine to straight up sleep in the master bedroom, so, upon arriving at Yu Zhongye's place, he asked Phoebe to prepare a guest bedroom for him.

Yu Zhongye didn't come back until two or three in the morning. Seeing that the lights in the guest bedroom were still on, he decided to walk in and take a look.

Xing Ming had already taken a shower and was lying on his stomach in bed without a blanket covering, concentrating on the laptop he'd brought. Only when Yu Zhongye got close did he hear the footsteps. Closing the laptop, Xing Ming turned around like nothing happened.

"What are you working on?" Yu Zhongye asked him, "You seem engrossed."

Xing Ming looked straight into Yu Zhongye's eyes and answered calmly, "Just

looking at the online reviews on my program since the latest episode just aired."

In fact, Xing Ming was searching for information about a fire disaster. His father had done a news report on it the year he was imprisoned. It had truly made sensational news that year when the whole structure of a factory had suddenly exploded noisily in the middle of the night. The massive fire had taken dozens of people's lives. The cause of the fire had soon been determined. It had been the result of a violation to the rules of operation on the liquefied natural gas storage tank by workers. They had used the gas tank as a hot pot and got burned to death. Apparently, the liquefied natural gas storage tank had accidentally detonated, setting off the fire. Hence, a heart-breaking inferno had been created. The case was handled in a rather pleasing way which basically met most people's expectations. The president of the local city's Municipal Commission on Housing and Urban-Rural Development had been removed from his job due to this massive fire. Meanwhile, the factory owner and some other individuals involved in the accident had also been held accountable and punished for violating regulations. In the end, the relevant governmental official had gotten fired, while the rich had been put in jail.

However, a woman with a child, the wife of one of the deceased victims, struggled to reach out to a reporter and insisted that the fire occurred before the explosion. She said her husband was framed by the others as an arsonist just because he'd rushed into the fire to save people when he'd temporarily returned to the factory to work that night and saw the growing blaze. A malicious coverup was created to help the hero turn into a criminal.

The indemnity for defamation was over ten billion based on her request, and, sobbing, she alleged she would turn to official petitions if compensation wasn't received. She even forced her child to kowtow on camera, rolling on the ground and begging for money. But the amount had been ridiculously huge. People wouldn't stop laughing about her once they heard of it. She looked more like a poor and pathetic countryside woman who, with her insanity and guts, dared to ask the government for money in the form of "blackmail".

The factory building that went ablaze had been built by Sheng-Yu, while at that time Hong Wanliang had been the Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee.

Xing Hong started an undercover investigation behind his boss' back. The woman's mad words seemed almost worth believing, since there'd been at least a few suspiciously unsolved questions that remained from that accident.

Yu Zhongye didn't seem suspicious of Xing Ming so he probably didn't notice that he'd been researching Xing Hong's case. With a faint smile, he said in a voice that held the mellowness of wine, "What are people saying online?"

"Most people liked it. There were only a few who gave a thumbs down." Xing Ming randomly fabricated some of the comments from netizens, then suddenly changed the subject of the conversation, saying, "*Laoshi*… all the people at the Station know about 'it.'"

He didn't clearly explain what "it" meant, but after finishing his words, he looked at Yu Zhongye quietly, waiting for his response.

Back in the days when Lin Siquan was Chairman Yu's secret lover, gossip and rumors rarely spread in the Station, for the chairman had been quite good at keeping his "relations" under wraps. After all, what he wanted wasn't scandal, but purely a fulfillment of his sexual needs.

They stared at each other for a good ten seconds. Yu Zhongye didn't seem surprised at all. Smiling, he said, "If they know, they know." Hand on the back of Xing Ming's head, Yu Zhongye pulled him closer, kissing his forehead. "Rest well."

Liu Yanan registered a Weibo account at noon on Friday, called "Liu Chongqi's youngest daughter." At 12:20, she made a post—an open letter to all the readers in the nation, demanding that the injustice be rectified.

The post was over three thousand characters long, providing in detail the complete story of the Liu case. Her writing was logical and clear, with a matter-of-fact tone, not expressing much sorrow or trying to make the whole case too sensational despite the boundless grievances described. Such a writing style quickly and easily appealed to the readers and won over their trust.

When it came to the last paragraph, she emphasized that Zhang Fang, one of the three accusers, had already gone to the police with her daughter and withdrawn the charge.

Although some decently big influencers helped with sharing the tweet to their followings, before the open letter grabbed enough public attention, all the related posts got deleted.

Clearly intending to force out the truth through the power of public opinion, Liu Yanan carried out her plans quickly. Only, the other side reacted even more quickly, making their countermove within the short span of time it too for two phone calls to reach Chairman Yu, one to the Station and the other to Yu Zhongye's private line. After hanging up the phone, Yu Zhongye turned it off and ordered all veteran staff members from the News department to report to his office.

He asked, "Who signed and passed the broadcasting list for young Luo's *Pearl Line*?"

Almost everyone at the Station supported Luo You's show about in-depth interviews and the investigation into Liu's case. Even Chairman Yu, the busiest man in this Station, took time out of his busy schedule to watch half of the TV show and gave it compliments. However, such praise was only based on the assumption that the news facts were consistent with the objective facts. Given that Chairman Yu was now questioning who signed the paper and gave permission to broadcast those episodes of the TV show, obviously there was something wrong and it was time to call someone to give an account.

Ol' Chen got slightly flustered. Signing the TV show list was supposed to be the editor-in-chief's job, but he had been the one who signed this approval request under the name of the director of the News Center.

Yu Zhongye turned to Editor Wang first and asked, "Why didn't you sign it?"

Chapter 25

A Boiling Frog

Yu Zhongye didn't return home even on Saturday. Or maybe he did, but it was so late that Xing Ming didn't get to see him because he'd already fallen asleep.

Xing Ming resumed jogging alone early in the morning. After Su Qinghua sniffed out the secret relationship between him and Yu Zhongye, Xing Ming no longer possessed the fear of being seen by acquaintances or being talked about behind his back by strangers. In any case, their relationship wasn't a secret anymore, and Chairman Yu himself didn't even seem concerned.

After a short stroll around the villa besieged by a silky lake and the towering mountains and after enjoying the pleasant panoramic view, Xing Ming went back to the Yu mansion and took a shower. Ol' Lin had the key to his home and helped to bring some of his clothes here. Phoebe sorted through all of clothes and put them in the main bedroom.

Walking out of the bathroom with his wet and naked body, he put on his bathrobe and pushed open the door of the main bedroom. The velvet bed remained neat and tidy, as if its owner had never returned the night before.

Since he was in this room and in no hurry to leave, Xing Ming walked to the window and looked outside. The days were getting hotter as summer approached. The villa was embraced by a grove of decorative trees in a vibrant green, some with blooming flowers and others with sprouting leaves in the palest green. These trees weren't all the same height, and, rustling in the breeze, they looked like the waves of a leafy ocean. The scattered fresh red petals embellished the crinkle-leaved bush, which made the canopies like a massive blanket of spotted colors. Amazed by the beauty of the flowers and trees, Xing Ming also saw the gardener, Tao Hongbin.

Tao Hongbin was an honest and hard-working man who was busy taking care of the garden even without anyone's supervision. It had been a long while since the last time Xing Ming came here. The thought of asking about the Tao and Cui's family situations were always in the back of his mind. In particular, he wondered whether Ol' Cui's son, Cui Haofei, was doing well recently and if his illness was being treated.

As Xing Ming kept thinking about how to start the conversation, a voice suddenly sounded in his ear from behind him. "What are you looking at?"

He turned around and saw Yu Zhongye coming in through the door. Subconsciously, he stepped backward a little bit.

In the past, despite the fact that seeds of doubts were secretly sowed in Xing Ming's mind, he never planned to give them any deep thoughts. However, now fear and surprise were almost overpowering him especially when his growing suspicion suddenly rose like a surging wave then spread like a wildfire.

Chapter 26

Honor of A Gallant Warrior

Xing Ming sat on the sidewalk waiting for the entire night. He didn't realize that on the night *Oriental TV Line* aired, someone had revealed the news that he was the son of Xing Hong, the "iron-blooded journalist" who'd been prosecuted for a sexual assault crime. They mentioned that it was only because of Xing Ming's personal experience, that he sympathized with perpetrators of rape and made biased statements.

Millions of Nan Ling's fans also contributed to retweeting the post about Xing Ming, although they didn't post hateful messages. From there more messages popped up. Some believed and others didn't, some only believed half the information. People criticized different parties, some going after Pearl Station and others going after the Red Cross. Individuals only needed a mouth and lips to speak, and everyone talked angrily. Everyone's opinions were rolling in and for a while, news on the internet was a complete mess.

Public sentiment fermented while public opinion boiled. The "North Korea-South Korea Nuclear Weapon Crisis" had reached a critical point, the "Last Folk Craftsmen" was stranded, and *Pearl Line's* Friday broadcast, a final self-examination on the Liu Chongqi case, with an opening and closing was a whole other issue.

Television stations like Pearl Station always understood they couldn't stand up against public opinion. It was better to clarify, then apologize and admit to carelessness than to attempt to block the onslaught of public sentiment. Although they still risked being able to please neither their superiors nor their audience, it was still important to try to mitigate the damage. After *Pearl Line's* broadcast aired, Pearl Station paid for a large number of fake social media accounts to write posts. By the weekend, public opinion on the internet was considered to be barely under control.

Xing Ming's greeting to Chairman Yu was completely in vain. He'd thought that Liu Yanan's case had been settled, that the old account would be clarified and cleared, and he'd been thinking about how he'd lovingly repay him. Xing Ming never expected Yu Zhongye to break his word regarding clarifying the situation, saying that it had been the correct episode.

The fallout? Of course, the impact hadn't ended well. Power is respected and there are official standards that must be followed. The chairman of Pearl Station should have easily understood the situation and followed through with communication and the expediency process, but he acted like he didn't understand it.

Xing Ming hadn't turned on his phone or gone online, he'd just hidden at home, sleeping there for the weekend. He knew that if Yu Zhongye really wanted to find

him, he easily could. After all, Ol' Lin still had his house keys.

Yu Zhongye never came looking for him.

By Monday morning, Xing Ming had cleaned himself up and as soon as he entered his office, he went to return the Parker gold pen to Ruan Ning. Then, under the eyes of his group, he took the initiative to head to the chairman's office to admit to his crimes.

Su Qinghua was at the office along with Ol' Chen. Seeing the two of them together seemed wrong somehow, like the world was in jeopardy. Xing Ming could tell that this was a very serious situation.

Ol' Chen took the lead and stated, "Netizens have switched their opinions and are creating a public outcry. I was surprised by it too. It seems like they weren't the ones who were making waves about wanting Liu-*laoshi* dead, and its good the netizens are so concerned. The more serious issue is that we're getting pressure from the top."

While Ol' Chen wasn't trying to be an alarmist, Xing Ming could see the severity of the issue based on the expression on Yu Zhongye's face.

The man looked extremely dignified despite being expressionless, and he possessed the faintest air of invitation. A mixed aroma of tobacco and cologne hung in the air, almost tangible. It strangely made Yu Zhongye seem both close and far away, both real and illusory.

"A moth flies toward a flame. Shoot first, ask questions later." Yu Zhongye looked at Xing Ming and didn't change his expression other than having the corner of his mouth tick up slightly. Unexpectedly it was almost like a smile. Continuing, he said, "You did good."

Holding his Golden Microphone recommendation, he handed the printed documents directly to Yu Zhongye before saying, "I take full responsibility for Thursday's live broadcast on *Oriental TV Line.* I am not the right candidate to nominate for the Golden Microphone award."

This wasn't the first time he found himself facing a war on all fronts, but it was the first where he was calm and wasn't panicking. Xing Ming looked straight at Yu Zhongye and quietly waited for his verdict.

"You don't want to be nominated for the Golden Microphone award." Yu Zhongye didn't take the documents symbolizing a host's highest honor from Xing Ming's hands. Instead, he asked, "What do you want?"

Yu Zhongye had asked him the same question at the equestrian club. At the time, he had gotten flustered by the question, didn't have time to think, and was too afraid to answer. Now he suddenly found his courage.

Xing Ming moved his lips and in a quiet but firm voice replied, "I want the truth?"

Chapter 27

Blessing and Karma

Yu Zhongye decided to let Xing Ming, the poor, forlorn, lost-looking little boy, back to Pearl Station after noticing his weariness in recent days. He was starting to look like a wilted flower.

Working sometimes meant a fixed-term sentence to some people, like young people in their twenties—around twenty-one or twenty-two years old—who'd received this over-thirty-year verdict right after graduation. Thereafter a miserable life awaited them. They'd have two days off a week and only during national holidays could they get a "release on parole." However, working was quite enjoyable to those "special" ones, those workaholics with their masochistic nature, got more comfortable as they worked more.

Xing Ming totally agreed with that figure of speech about work.

After he'd returned to Pearl Station Garden, he noticed something amusing: Luo You was avoiding him.

And he knew *why*.

In the past, they'd seen each other as well-matched rivals that were always against each other like two male beasts aggressively fighting over territory. But now Luo You had clearly been thoroughly defeated, and there were no bargaining chips left for him.

Love was indeed something complicated and vaguely defined, like a mysterious puzzle. Not a single rule could be applied to the world of love, and neither could a single trick—there was no "first come, first serve," and no "try fair means before resorting to force." He thought there would be a sense of pride as the winner, like a boy getting a triumphant gleam to his smile during victory, or a beast flinging itself at its opponent with its sharp fangs and claws, tearing its flesh, slashing its way across its defenses, and reclaiming dominion. But it turned out there was only a tinge of sadness and sentimentality that suddenly sprung from his mind.

Xing Ming met Yu Zhongye, and Yu Zhongye met Xing Ming. Their love was both a blessing and a karmic, fated disaster.

Xing Ming turned in an application for legal expertise to the Forensic Expertise Institute on behalf of Cui Wenjun. The institute was a place where Xing Ming graduated from. He got on the airplane with lingering guilt etched into his mind. Upon arrival at the destination, he took a cab and headed to the village where the *Revenge of Shanxiao* started.

Yu Shao'ai was with him, and he'd volunteered to come on his own. There was barely any talk between them enroute. Both of them knew the unspeakable thought in each other's mind: the silence spoke volumes about their shared hope—that the

issue with the Cui family had nothing to do with Sheng-Yu. Yet their motives were different. Xing Ming didn't want to cause any more trouble by once again getting into conflict with Sheng-Yu while Yu Zhongye was ill in bed. Meanwhile Yu Shao'ai deeply dreaded the thought of being torn by the choice of hiding the truth, or cruelly ruining the future of his relatives.

They were welcomed by the local town's mayor with great warmth after hours of bumpily riding along the sinuous mountain paths. Any journalist from a well-known TV station would be treated as distinguished and valued guests.

The mayor by name of Niu was particularly interested in leading Xing Ming to the dead Shanxiao beaten by the villagers. With a deliberately dramatic look on his face, Mayor Niu brought Xing Ming to the carcass of the creature. But his lies were soon seen through when Xing Ming cast doubt on this dead body: despite its deformed skull and skeleton, this pile of putrid bones was in fact seemingly pieced out by those of pigs and cattle. The so-called *Revenge of Shanxiao* was nothing more than an old wives' tale, a forged story that was blown, like a deck of cards stacked into a pyramid suddenly getting collapsed by a whiff of a blow.

Although Xing Ming just casually questioned him to test the waters, Mayor Niu suddenly seemed like a bundle of nerves as he served tea and wrung his hands in agitation like he was facing an enemy. He told Xing Ming that the county had never sent out any false information and the skeleton was preserved as an act of trust.

Xing Ming could read the *fear* that surged in this man's eyes—he was afraid of him.

Ironically, it was a rather fresh experience. Before the last episode of *Oriental TV Line,* he was a host whose face always appeared on television, yet he hadn't received much praise, respect, or awe. But ever since the final episode was aired and his job returned to that of an average reporter, he turned into the center of attention, everyone would take a quick glance at him wherever he went. One of the most bizarre experiences took place in Jilin Wangqing National Nature Reserve situated in northeastern China, where he was threatened by the poachers who held up their shotguns and pointed at his chest. Those were the vintage birds hunting guns made from cast iron, which could blow one's brains out with their sheer power. He threw both his hands up in the air and just glared into the eyes of one of the poachers without any fear. In the end, that man with a fierce face spit on the ground, swearing, "You're a real fucking man!" Then he put away his gun and walked off.

This reminded him of a saying, "Good fortune has its roots in disaster." Though in the past he would snap his fingers at it—as it seemed overly optimistic and boring, now he would opt to reconsider its deeper meaning.

They declined Mayor Niu's invitation to a bathhouse—the "bathhouse" or "spa" somehow seemed like it had a secret air of obscenity, at least judging from Mayor Niu's lecherous smile and crooked squinting eyes. Leaving the county government's building, Xing Ming and Yu Shao'ai spent the night planning their next steps in a random hotel. Yu Shao'ai chalked it up as a wasted trip since the *Revenge of Shanxiao* was a total nonsense; but Xing Ming couldn't help thinking that this

investigation wasn't finished. There was something they had missed, something like a missing piece from a puzzle just awaiting discovery.

The next two days in this place were also unfruitful, nothing new was found. Then, an unexpected guest knocked on their door for a visit on the early morning of the fourth day. It was a man in his thirties, wearing a pair of black framed glasses who looked quite genial and gentle—but he had a strange limp. He made a self-introduction, saying that his name was Gao Feng, a civil servant working at a local Institute of Geomechanics. But now he had been suspended from his duties.

Seeing this man heading into the room covered with a cap and a facial mask, Yu Shao'ai commented with amusement, "You look more like a burglar than a government worker."

"I have to hide myself since there are many eyes around." A sheepish smile appeared on Gao Feng's face.

"Why?"

"I saw you two in front of the county government's building yesterday and I knew you were reporters from Pearl Station. The fact is there are many children who are sick despite the tale about Shanxiao being a fabricated lie. And I know the real cause." Gao Feng stated.

"So, what do you think the cause is?"

"Contamination," he alleged with confidence.

"Do you have proof?" Xing Ming asked cautiously.

This county was a pleasant and beautiful place where the sky was azure blue, and the smooth lake was crystal clear.

"Yep," Gao Feng nodded seriously, "The source of pollution is a pharmaceutical factory called Kang Rui. Their illegal dumping of hazardous waste is causing pollution in the groundwater. Children are much more vulnerable to the waterborne illness than the adults, so their symptoms appeared first. In fact, there are many cases of adults bearing spinal cord injuries and brain injuries too. Here, I've got all the records." He pulled out a notebook with the detailed list of residents who'd been affected by the biochemical contaminated groundwater. The number of infected people tallied up to nearly a hundred.

Xing Ming flipped through the pages and asked, "You've been doing all this, yourself?"

"I once reported this to the Ministry of Environmental Protection, but the local government did nothing, and even tried to stop me from any further investigations. My job was suspended, and I started receiving several threats. You see, it was during that time that my leg was crippled."

Wearing a puzzled look, Yu Shao'ai interrupted, "But why?"

“Only in recent times has this place started to get wealthier and more prosperous. If you’d come and visited two years ago, you would not see as many luxurious cars as you do right now. The pharmaceutical business brought pollution as well as great economic growth. Yet environmental protection is not the top priority of the local government, instead, economic growth is.” Gao Feng stated while knitting his eyebrows.

“Although it’s good to see the results of rapid economic growth, it shouldn’t be at the cost of our next generation’s health. In the past, they could still get away with it due to the lack of environmental protection policies. Now though, given that the *Environmental Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China* has been brought into force, businesses which are illegally dumping contaminated waste should be held liable for the damages caused. However, they’ve become cunning—whenever supervisory agents go for a check, nothing in particular will be found. To be honest, I don’t quite get it. Those businesses would rather rack their brains for a way to be a fugitive from the environmental crimes, intentionally disregarding the law—even if the result of violation could be sentences and imprisonment—than take an environmental stewardship.”

Xing Ming sneered and the corner of his mouth crooked. *Was it really that hard to understand?* There was always a group of people, apathetic paper chasers, who stressed over benefits and gains and had little regard for human life.

Saving Gao Feng’s contact information, Xing Ming decided to reach out to him later after doing a fieldwork investigation and he reminded the other man to be careful. This county was a remote place, and it was somewhat perilous given that it was out from direct supervision when it came to government law and order. Based on Xing Ming’s experience, there might be a chance that those illegal enterprises may hire the outlaws to threaten him no matter what it would take.

“*I know*.” Gao Feng had stated with a nod. He had told both his wife and kid to go back to their hometown and cut off all contact with them a while ago.

Suddenly a feeling of sorrow emerged from Xing Ming’s mind—Gao Feng chose to “abandon his wife and son” and left them a paper of “divorce announcement” just like what Xing Hong had done over a decade ago. He walked him out, they were wrapped in the wintry wind, strolling abreast. Although Xing Ming wanted to tell him that he was as good as his father, he found it too much, so he used a different analogy, “You know, you’re kind of like Julia Roberts from *Erin Brockovich*.”

Gao Feng hadn’t watched the film so didn’t recognize Xing Ming’s reference. Then all of a sudden, he snatched his notebook from Xing Ming, quickly turned to a page and pointed to a photo. He informed him that this was the pharmaceutical factory’s hidden drainage system, and it was used for illegally dumping contaminated waste. Gao Feng had scouted them throughout his investigations and the locations were clearly marked out and charted.

The notebook was earnestly entrusted to Xing Ming. Gao Feng solemnly explained “Like the old saying goes, ‘the road to Shu is harder than scaling the sky afar.’ I’m afraid the protection of rights is comparably hard in this case. All the

pollution victims are waiting for the information in this notebook to be exposed. They want justice."

Casting a glance over the map charted by Gao Feng, Xing Ming was visibly stunned, "It's… a very important piece of evidence. Why are you entrusting me with it?"

Gao Feng grinned silently before his eyes were drawn to chattering voices not far away. A flock of kids pranced across the street in ordered lines, prattling, and singing gleefully and sweetly. It might have been an outdoor school excursion.

Following his gaze, Xing Ming looked around and those happy kids leapt into his line of sight. Delight, responsibility, kinship, and love all seemed to be overflowing in Gao Feng's eyes. Xing Ming reminded him to be safe once again.

They shook hands firmly during their farewell. Gao Feng told him he had watched every episode of *Oriental TV Line*, although it was a shame that it had been suspended. He declared that it was the best television news program in China beyond a doubt.

Yu Shao'ai took the evidence and information that Gao Feng had collected over the years after the man had limped away. Xing Ming was amazed. Gao Feng was a man who had fought against a "great power" alone for years just like a lone knight, or underdog heroic figures in Hollywood movies. Once the last page was reviewed, Yu Shao'ai, who had been silent the entire time, suddenly breathed a sigh of relief. "Anyway, it's good that this has nothing to do with Sheng-Yu."

Without posing any response to his words, Xing Ming told him to put away the notebook and keep it safe. Then the two visited the Kang Rui pharmaceutical factory again before night fall.

The door of the factory was closed shut, guards were patrolling around, and no visitors were allowed in. Instead of breaking in, Xing Ming hovered around the imposing pharmaceutical factory buildings and finally found a few garbage bags that weren't in an obscure corner.

Yu Shao'ai saw some thrown-away medicine packings from the garbage bags for which Xing Ming was rummaging around, and tried to stop him, who almost ran insane digging in the rubbish. Yu Shao'ai chasing after him, crying, "Collaborating with contract research organizations is common practice for large pharmaceutical companies in the West. It isn't surprising that domestic large enterprises in the certain market have some kinds of *partnerships* in the process of medicine production. You can't draw the conclusion that it has something to do with the pollution!"

Yu Shao'ai couldn't help using English words while speaking in haste; yet not a single word reached Xing Ming in his absent-minded state. He shoved Yu Shao'ai away, took out a medicine package that he'd scrounged up from the garbage and hurled it at the young man's face.

Xing Ming was quite aware of the logo on the package. After all, it had appeared in *Oriental TV Line's* live broadcast studio as an emblem of sponsorship for half a

year.

It was *Sheng-Yu.*

However, as they hurried back to the Station by train, Xing Ming heard news of Cui Wenjun committing suicide via car crash.

Cui Wenjun, the poor man, had stood in front of Sheng-Yu International Business Club holding a sign that read “We Want Justice!” for several consecutive days as rain pelted down on him. During that time even when some nicely dressed white-collar workers under umbrellas passed by, they just flicked him looks of either sympathy or disdain. None came forward to ask if this white-haired old man had received any unfair treatment or injustices.

Only the security guard had walked out of his tiny surveillance room and given Ol’ Cui a hand with standing up when he stumbled and almost fell. Finally, this old man had been given the chance to speak.

Despite his hunchback due to lumbar muscle strains caused by years of carrying heavy objects at work, Cui Wenjun had struggled to stand up straight, yet he was just too tired. Last time Host Xing had offered them some money and he really wanted it, but his son had turned it away with a firm refusal. Life had gotten tougher, and he had no idea how much longer he could continue hanging on.

The security guard and Ol’ Cui were nearly the same age. While in his life, the security guard had suffering enough where he felt he had the right to be old and bitter, it was beyond his imagination that someday he would meet someone with an even more miserable old life than him. He sympathized with Cui Wenjun, the wounded and drenched man, so he walked back to his surveillance room before delivering him a cup of hot water.

“Here, man,” he passed Cui Wenjun the disposable paper cup. “Once you finish drinking, you’ll have to leave.”

Perhaps Cui Wenjun had been standing there for too long because a horrible paleness appeared on his weather-beaten face. Cui Wenjun gave a cry of gratitude, clutching the paper cup cautiously and sipping it slowly—he drank the hot water like he was tasting Shao Dao Zi, a pungent flavored liquor. That little bit of warmth finally cheered up his ice-cold heart, making him feel like a vagrant finding a cozy shelter during a merciless winter.

After Ol’ Cui drained the cup, the security guard sighed and with gentle persuasion said, “Hey, man, I just got a call from my boss. You have to leave, otherwise I will be the one who has to walk off.”

Cui Wenjun gave a friendly nod in polite acceptance. “I’m sorry for troubling you…”

Tears trickled down his face along with the icy rain before his statement had even finished. This pathetic man who strove to live his life through all his efforts and strength, was accustomed to bearing all tears, blood, and bitterness on his own. In fact, he was the kind of person who never wanted to burden other people.

When the disposable paper cup had already collapsed in his hands, Cui Wenjun decided to leave at last. His face was pale and haggard, yet he still stared blankly into the air and stood in front of Sheng-Yu's skyscraper in trance. He had no idea who he was really waiting for—that dapper man in suit and tie with a beaming smile who was in charge of the new medicine, or a bold and reckless journalist who was willing to speak out the truth in their stead.

But the truth was: the head of the new medicine company was long gone. He had been invited to a dinner party tonight, and was already fed up with Ol' Cui, so he'd snuck out through the underground parking lot.

However, not a single journalist who was armed with eloquence of diction and insightful words, showed up. The words from that kind and right-thinking journalist, Host Xing, suddenly flashed across Cui Wenjun's mind, but they had no evidence. If there was no evidence, the court wouldn't hear or accept the case, and no reporter would report it.

But how could a good boy suddenly become partially paralyzed? He couldn't figure it out at all.

It was the first time that Ol' Cui, an illiterate country folk, found that there were too many unsolvable matters in his life.

He couldn't understand why his dear son still often suffered so much pain all over his body in spite of his paraplegia. His son never screamed from it, but when the affliction overwhelmed him so much, he would scratch at the wall till the paint was peeling and his fingernails were torn off, bloody and bruised. Each time he saw it, he had to turn his face away, feeling sad and helpless while witnessing his son's agonies. As a father his heart felt like it was being torn up, writhing, and struggling in a burning flame, or as if it was soaked in the most bitter water of Marah.

While thinking of his beloved son, who was now partially paralyzed in bed, Ol' Cui couldn't stop recalling the day when his son had just received an offer from the college. Cui Haofei, a gifted child, the highest scorer of *Gao Kao*, the nationally standardized college entrance exam, earned great attention from throngs of media reporters. His grandmother had not passed away at that time, and this sluggish yet amicable old woman suddenly became nimble, scurrying around with the firecrackers like a hare. Gleeful words had spouted out from her dry mouth even though the line of her teeth was like a rotting fence. "My grandson's got a promising future! A great honor for our family!"

In the sprinkling rain, tons of memories flooded Cui Wenjun's head and his last memory among them was when his wife was still at home. Their family wasn't wealthy, but they got by fairly well and the place where he worked offered him personal accident insurance, which covered several hundred thousand yuan.

He left a letter—or more precisely, a will—to Xing Ming.

Although suicide wouldn't guarantee a death benefit covered by the insurance, Xing Ming insisted on respecting Ol' Cui's last wishes, at least running an errand for him wasn't a difficult task… Then he reached toward Cui Haofei's mother with the letter and told her to pick up her son for treatment, that woman avoided him.

When he went to the insurance company with the insurance contract, the receptionist was baffled. “Well, the agent who sold this insurance policy left a long time ago.”

After hearing the ins and outs of the whole story, that man felt quite sorry, and sighed, “His insurance policy lapsed ten years ago.”

In addition to the void insurance contract in his hand, Xing Ming soon received another flimsy piece of paper, a medical report from the Forensic Expertise Institute.

This report from his school, however, was in stark contrast to the conclusion drawn from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This one clearly stated: “A causal relationship between the acute transverse myelitis of the subject and the experimental drug cannot be ruled out.”

With Cui Haofei’s medical report, Xing Ming walked out of his alma mater, suddenly feeling unable to move anymore, too tired to even sit down.

The soft and puffy clouds collected and perched in the lower sky as beads of rain descending like countless threads of silver lines. A face reflected on the car window rose before Xing Ming’s eyes: it was a face young but worn-out, familiar yet strange.

He had the right to submit the news topic to *Pearl Line* as a reporter, but whether the producer would accept it and how it would be produced wasn’t under his control. There was no way he could ask Chairman Yu for a favor, and he also wouldn’t dare to ask him whether he was willing to “betray” his family, give up his future career, and even stand against his young son.

He viewed his reflection, a perplexed, funny yet pathetic young man, just like a clown.

It was already at noon when he finally made his way back to the V.I.P. wards for government officials in Pu Ren Hospital. Yu Zhongye asked him, “Why haven’t I seen you with Shao’ai recently?”

After a while of pondering, Xing Ming said, “He’s probably mad at me.”

He knew what he was angry about, and the fact that Yu Shao’ai had been in the Hong’s house since they’d returned. Since the day they had hastily left the county, the materials that seemed slanted against Sheng-Yu had stayed in Yu Shao’ai’s hands. For days, all Xing Ming’s calls had been rejected. That period of time when Yu Shao’ai was cynical of Liu Chongqi’s case, burning with rage, and eager for justice and righteousness seemed to be gone. Justice and the truth no longer appeared to have the utmost importance when trouble concerned Sheng-Yu and Yu Shao’ai’s aunt and uncle. *Family ties* were a foundation, the very essence of the family’s well-being after all.

Lunch was delivered by the nurse and the food didn’t look bad. It was a balanced diet with vegetables, meat, soup, dairy products and even fruit. Yu Zhongye left his meal untouched, while Xing Ming who felt starved, polishing off the bowl of rice

while leaving all the vegetables. In the end, all the food was stuffed into his mouth and his cheeks puffed up like a little hamster.

Even so, the growling of his stomach revealed his insatiable hunger.

Xing Ming ditched his chopsticks and asked the nurse to fetch him an iron bucket full of rice. Then he scooped the food with a large rice ladle and gobbling it up. A clinking sound was resounded from the bucket every time the ladle hit its wall.

In silence, Yu Zhongye kept watching him devour the food.

As hungry as a wolf and bolting down everything without chewing, he gluttonously shoving so much rice in his mouth that his whole face flushed. However, even when he almost choked, he never stopped eating.

He felt as if there was a dark hole inside his hollow body that corrupted his flesh and bones. There was a feeling of emptiness and weakness, like an unhealed, festering wound—he had no idea when and how it developed, but it was bleeding unendingly and difficult to fill.

The bland flavored rice grains soon tasted salty from Xing Ming's falling tears.

Yu Zhongye walked up behind Xing Ming and lay a hand on the back of his neck without saying any words of comfort.

Perhaps since his body temperature was slightly lower than others, as the fingers were stroking his nape, it felt just like they were running through a silky satin.

In fact, Yu Zhongye had heard most of the gossip spread among those whisperers, even Ol' Lin had once mentioned some stories in a roundabout way. They uttered the lament for the love between Chairman Yu and Xing Ming was just like that of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Consort Yang, one criticized by the masses and doomed to tragedy. With a notion of pity, they talked about how the chairman's reputation had been ruined henceforth. Sometimes, in the most tactfully euphemistic way, such a misfortune was attributed to "true love". However, "true love" sounded highly improbable and naive to a man of his age who survived the hardships of a long life and attained success and social status.

Anyhow, the theory of "true love" was nothing more than bullshit.

Xing Ming wept silently, struggling to hide his sniveling from Yu Zhongye at first. Then he no longer restrained himself from letting out sobs as soon as he felt the touch of the other man's hand on his nape. Deeply desperate, he was down in the dumps, the heartbreaking crying almost flooded him, feeling as if there was an overflowing torrent shattering the whole bucket of rice.

A tremor overtook Yu Zhongye at the sorrow, and he felt helpless in the face of Xing Ming's crying. His heart tightened, and his hand shook.

He was the chairman of Pearl Station, the future deputy minister of the Ministry of Public Security. The former was a sub-ministerial level position, while the latter was at the provincial-ministerial level position. Although he'd never intended to

achieve these with fair means or foul, both were the fruits of his labor over the years.

The emperor's dilemma was in choosing between a lover and the state. For Yu Zhongye, it would be choosing between Xing Ming and the Station. Except, Yu Zhongye shouldn't need to deal with this sort of dilemma.

Xing Ming started high-pitched whimpering as more tears racing down his face. A long while after, Yu Zhongye whispered, "Don't cry."

With regard to their relationship, he himself felt puzzled. It started with the great impression he had towards this young and dauntless man who'd arrived with ulterior motives in their first meeting. Ever since then, he'd taken a shine to him, half out of affection and half of respect. Somehow inexplicably he'd became used to doting upon this little brat, caring for him and loving him like he was *the one*.

He'd always felt torn between expecting his obedience and enjoying his wild spirit.

Tears kept dripping down and soon fatigue engulfed Xing Ming after he took his anger and sadness out on Yu Zhongye, who then gently fondled and held him in his arms. Then Yu Zhongye placed a soft, tender kiss on Xing Ming's head and hair.

"Do what you want," he said, sighing in weariness like a lingering kiss.

Four months after its initial suspension, *Oriental TV Line* returned with *Revenge of Shanxiao.*

While preparing the materials for reporting and revealing Sheng-Yu's crimes and misdeeds, Xing Ming worked with Gao Feng and started bringing the victims together to sue Sheng-Yu in court. The news about the return of *Oriental TV Line* soon spread like a wildfire. Meanwhile, Liao Jun didn't view it as a big deal. She was quite sure of the fact that Yu Zhongye wouldn't ruin his own future and that his son, Yu Shao'ai, the dear grandson of Hong Wanliang, wouldn't agree to hurt his own family.

Liao Jun thought that maybe the issue would be glossed over, just as others had been in the past. No matter what Xing Ming had done in secret, Yu Zhongye would look the other way as per usual, and, out of the respect of Chairman Yu, she would not harm Xing Ming, the apple of his eye.

With the exception of Gao Feng, the thorn in Sheng-Yu's side, most of the villagers who'd suffering from disease caused by the pollution were short-sighted and greedy individuals who would easily agree to settle out of court after receiving a few bribes. The Laws of the Jungle—"Kill or be killed" and "Shoot first, ask questions later"—had been engrained into the heart of Sheng-Yu for years. Hence, Liao Jun told her younger brother the simplest way to sort out any problems was by finishing Gao Feng off. After all, an average lower-class man like Gao Feng was powerless. He was filled with fury and courage yet lacking in actual influence.

Thereupon one day Xing Ming suddenly lost contact with Gao Feng. Their connection was abruptly cut off just like how Yu Shao'ai suddenly vanished from

his sight and his life.

Without corroborated proof, without the collected evidence that was still in Yu Shao'ai's hands, and without an actual plaintiff, suing Sheng-Yu judicially was no longer an option.

Any reporter should always stick to the core principles of objectivity, impartiality and fairness, and media coverage should never be used as a solid weapon for protecting the rights or solid proof of a charge. Even though the Liao siblings didn't make anything out of dealing with the troubles caused by Xing Ming, they didn't completely put down their guards. The world of business was full of wargames. As the art of war claimed, "Soft power works more wisely than the hard power." This meant crushing the morale of the enemy was better than enforcing violence. Given all these years of struggling, Liao Jun soon came up with a solution that was viable without lifting a finger.

When Liao Hui personally "invited" Xing Ming out, the host was tied up again and taken blindfolded to the meeting place. Liao Hui's face came into his sight right after the blindfold was removed and quickly the dizziness caused by the sudden sunlight faded as his vision was restored.

"You're Yu-*shu*'s bed partner, so I guess we're all part of the same family now."

Liao Hui started spouting nonsense and stressed that the complexity of environmental pollution issues wasn't due to inaction but because of great challenge and difficulties. In terms of the current situation, the domestic pharmaceutical companies were of one kind in terms of partaking in environmental guardianship and Sheng-Yu ranked the best among them all. Over the years, efforts had been made to improve the management and technology of wastewater treatment, to set about reaching the standards. He added that the amount of charitable donations from Sheng-Yu were way ahead of the others within the industry and its newly developed drugs had saved many lives each year.

Although he was full of hot air and boasting nonsense, Xing Ming remained resolute and as cold as ice. He uttered the words one by one, "Just you wait, you *will* go to prison! Even if I fail this time, it's only a matter of time before Sheng-Yu's business productions stop and you'll need to pay huge amounts of compensation."

Seemingly unsurprised, Liao Hui gave no indication of concern. Instead, he tugged up the corners of his mouth to present a vile smirk and bared his white teeth and blood red lips, like a starving beast with a devilish grin.

"Don't you want to overturn your father's case?" he asked with confidence like he had everything in the bag.

Xing Ming was slightly dumbfounded.

A wise businessman is always watchful. Capturing the barest hint of hesitation revealed in Xing Ming's eyes, Liao Hui made a detailed explanation, "Remember that girl Yin Xiaojie, your dad's student and intern? Her husband does business with Sheng-Yu. We can arrange for her to testify on your father's behalf, tell the public

that she's been feeling guilty for years and finally made up her mind to confess that she brought false charges of sexual assault against your dad. How's that?"

At each word his fists clenched unconsciously, nails almost pierced into his palm, and the cracking sounds from his bones sounded like an old machine rattling.

"Ah, by the way, you remember Zhang Hongfei? The man who disappeared all of a sudden? I can reach out to him as well and have him tell you the names of the prison guards who beat your dad in the prison and pinned him against the bedpan. Wei Ming can kneel and ask forgiveness from your dad in front of his grave. Aren't these what you have always desired?"

Shit, he's right, Xing Ming realized helplessly. This man had seized his Achilles' heel effortlessly—this was exactly what he'd always wanted. The overwhelming desire to redress the injustice of his father's case was just like burning embers, waiting for the day when the flames of rage and hope could burn and melt the sky at the crack of dawn over the years.

A long silence allowed Xing Ming to carefully reflect. To make himself sound more persuasive, Liao Hui told him, "You know why you can't find Gao Feng? Because he got in a car accident." In an even more boorish and repulsive manner, he continued while loudly slurping his tea. He may have been making that noisy sucking sound on purpose. "Severe concussion. Don't know when he'll regain consciousness and if he could be summoned to testify.

"Yu Shao'ai can't take a stand against his grandfather, and now you've lost your only witness! How will you topple Sheng-Yu?! With your TV show? Public opinions? In that case, it'll just showcase your emotional imbalance and unprofessionalism. You know, it's been years since your dad's case was closed, overturning it on your own is practically impossible. Just think, how many years have you been teased and mocked?" Coming across aggressively with his detestable face drawing closer to Xing Ming, Liao Hui uttered each word like a venomous serpent, hissing, "Let's smooth this over, if you accept this then your dad will finally rest in peace." He sounded exceptionally assured.

A fabricated heroic story was spinning inside Liao Hui's head, a rather ridiculous and deceptive lie. He imagined a poor orphan child from a humble family, carrying a deep-seated resentment, thrashing around night after night on a mission for revenge. Then as time slipped by and the days where he felt desperate and powerless became more numerous than his memories from before, the little boy grew and became courageous, finally forcing his enemies and the powerful corporate leaders to yield, clearing his departed father's name. *What an inspirational story!*

Xing Ming probably knew what his face looked like as he stared daggers at Liao Hui—Liao Hui would have already been slaughtered if there was a knife nearby, and he would have been stabbed multiple times with deadly wounds all over his body.

After glaring at him for a long time, Xing Ming moved his lips, enunciating each word clearly.

Just five words.

"You can go to hell."

Liao Hui's phone rang before he was able to slap Xing Ming in the face. Taking the phone from his men, he glanced over the call number. Then the anger on his face instantly extinguished as Liao Hui said bitterly, "Well, you're under that man's protection. See, I just 'invited' you here for a moment and now he's asking about you."

Unlike last time, Xing Ming was safely and soundly escorted out by a few men.

Right after getting home, he got in his car and to head the hospital just like normal, but the moment his hands rested on the steering wheel, he seemed to be at a loss, unsure of his destination. His aimless driving started from the south of the city, then went north, where he turned east at a corner and continued roaming aimlessly. Later, his car got pulled over by a police officer at a crossroad when he almost ran the red light.

The traffic officer grinned, seeming to recognize him. "Hey, you're Xing Ming, right?"

This young officer, a big fan of Host Xing, finally decided to let him off with just a verbal warning. Xing Ming who seemed to be in a trance just pulled his driver's license out of his pocket and murmured, "I've lost something."

Indeed, there was something he'd *lost*.

A long-awaited *dream* after the river of time flowed for over twelve years.

He'd never thought there would be a time like this, where his dream could finally come true, so close and so soon. But all of a sudden, he'd been startled from that fond dream. His illusions had shattered, and his hatred and grievances had become transient. They'd melted away and were gone like dust in the wind. All love and hate were etched on a very distant memory.

After parking the car in the underground garage of the hospital, Xing Ming locked himself away in the small space with windows and door tightly shut. He left another message with Yu Shao'ai and while he didn't pick up his phone, this time he didn't block the message. Xing Ming got down to the point and bluntly admitted the current complications—some of the villagers had given up the protest while others persisted, however, Gao Feng, the person most vital to this case, had been critically injured and sent to the hospital. This new situation had all been orchestrated by Yu Shao'ai's family. He continued explaining that with the approval by the chairman he was able to keep making the show the *Revenge of Shanxiao*, but was thwarted by absolute objectivity and the fact that news coverage was insufficient to be discretionary factors…

In spite of the slim hope, each word Xing Ming spoke was sincere.

It was not hard to imagine the ways Yu Shao'ai might listen to his message—he might be sitting in his grandfather's mansion with the same thought as Xing Ming

reeling in his head; being a human was so fucking hard! The Chinese character for "person", 人, had a shape like an inverted "Y", like a crossroads. It showed that living as a person was about making choices, being torn by two forces that pulled them in either direction, splitting them down the middle.

But till the end, there were always some who refused to stay down. Those people would get up, stand straight, and continue to fight.

Only those with indomitable spirits should be called *real men*.

Though Yu Shao'ai was still struggling to overcome his moral conflicts, like he'd been mired a swamp, Xing Ming's mind was tranquil like a still pond. He had made his choice.

He stepped into the ward and happened to meet Luo You, who stood frozen and stared at him with eyes expressing a soundless despair. Xing Ming had heard the dispute while approaching the ward from the elevator but didn't catch every word. Only the last sentence was explicit and clear.

Luo You, the young man with tears streaming down his face, wailing "*Laoshi*." He said that this was do or die for him. In dramas and stories, those who were determined to go for broke, to burn down their path of retreat and bet everything on one last battle, those desperate people were always honored as heroes. In reality however, they were just martyrs, those pitiable people who didn't even know what they were dying for.

Luo You had always felt that he and Yu Zhongye were very much alike: they were the kind of people who were selfish, utilitarian, and apathetic.

They were supposed to be a perfect match, but Xing Ming, that filthy homewrecker, who did he think he was?

Grievances, resentment, and confusion howled inside his head, but unexpectedly, Yu Zhongye, the ungrateful man, added salt to his wounds. Yu Zhongye glanced over at Xing Ming at the entryway, his eyes soft. He was a man who had kept his word. Thus, with a smile, he turned toward Luo You and spoke his dagger-like words: "Don't ever call me *laoshi* again."

Chapter 28

Epilogue

Xing Ming's reaction was not completely unexpected by Sheng-Yu, but the Liao's seemed to be quite confident. As the saying goes, life had a way of sorting itself out; there were always ways to cover up contamination incidents in the pharmaceutical factories even if they were unable to shrug off the trouble Xing Ming had brought to them. On the other hand, the *Revenge of Shanxiao* aired on schedule. People would learn from the failure and setbacks, just as the Chinese proverb stated, "a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit." When Xing Ming came back as a TV host after the incident, he seemed much more composed, calm, and experienced.

Enormous debates and discussions popped up online as the news program about congenital anomalies caused by contamination caused quite a stir. But the real reason why the government took measures to start in-depth investigations was because of the tip-off material handed in by an informant.

Yu Shao'ai had sent in the report and Hong Wanliang almost jumped down his throat after realizing it and promptly went to bed ill. Or perhaps he just pretended to be sick since it meant he could put off meeting with his nephew and nephew-in-law. He could turn against Yu Zhongye, but Hong Wanliang would never hurt his only grandson so badly.

He clearly knew any efforts would be of little avail once the public was incited by rage, and the wisest course of action was to make some sacrifices to secure the major interests. There were no kinds of schemes that could help Sheng-Yu to get through this, especially when Secretary Hong allowed the government to get involved in this case.

As expected, Liao Hui, the legal representative and general manager of Sheng-Yu was suspected of serious disciplinary violations and was arrested by the police soon after. He awaited up to 20 years of imprisonment, and Liao Jun wouldn't be exempt from receiving punishment either once further investigations were processed.

The Liao siblings went barking mad in the prison and clutched at straws, trying to find something that might help and to trump up charges against Yu Zhongye. Their plan was to file a complaint to the judiciary so that they could reduce their sentence.

Since the former chairman of the Pearl Station had been impeached by his driver and thereby stepped down, they thought the current incumbent, Yu Zhongye, could easily be toppled the same way. Ol' Lin's son became their first target. However, their schemes were defeated since both Lin and his son seemed to have been well-prepared and had already emigrated to a foreign country.

In a desperate situation, they decided to rake up the past, including all the dirty deals within Sheng-Yu. That giant company was a place where "survival of the fittest" was the golden rule. How could a man like Yu Zhongye gain enough power to become chairman of a state-run TV station? Their reasoning was simple: no one's

hands were clean, including his.

However, no matter how hard they tried to find fault with Yu Zhongye, all their attempts failed. Yu Zhongye remained safe in his position.

On the eve of the Station's anniversary party which gathered the nation's attention, Yu Zhongye resigned of his own will.

Although there was nothing wrong when the chairman of a TV station chose to leave job with the excuse of illness, some gossip was bound to spread amongst the public.

Speculations abounded. Among those rumors, the most outrageous one said that someone had written a complaint letter and sent it anonymously to the government. The letter disclosed the details of the illegal deeds that Chairman Yu committed in recent years as well as solid evidence and proof for each bribery case. Then at the time when the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection was about to take steps to start thorough investigations on all of the people at the Station, Yu Zhongye paid a visit to Secretary Hong personally and they had a four-hour conversation. No one knew what they talked about, but everyone knew that the chairman ultimately chose resignation in exchange for saving "some people" at the Station. Hence, what was past would stay in the past and all his prior "debts" were written off. Any problems related to Sheng-Yu ended when Liao Hui was placed in jail and every issue caused by the Station was solved when Ol' Chen received his punishment.

Those discussion posts online were only half-truths—some of them were so sensational and deliberately exaggerated that they were quickly forced to be deleted before they could cause any significant impact.

In fact, other than insiders to the affair, most people online knew little about the true story. They were only shocked by Chairman Yu's decision since his whole career could be ruined by this.

Some of them guessed it was mainly due to love, but that sounded like a person blinded by lust and affection. Others speculated his resignation was in the name of justice and seeking the truth, yet that kind of thinking just seemed too naïve.

Chairman Yu didn't treat the first speculation seriously and simply laughed off that "love theory," while sneering at the latter one. In his own words, the reason for leaving the office was body illness. But to most people's surprise, just a few months after Yu Zhongye went home to recuperate, he officially ventured into business. The usual outcome hadn't come as expected and the result was a big shock.

The Hua Neng Corporate Group released an official statement; Yu Zhongye was going to be its Chief Executive Officer.

Many more rumors about Yu Zhongye's new job emerged online. Their previous "bad-king theory" was changed into "conspiracy theory" and "*Thick Black Theory*" all of a sudden.

(Note: It is a philosophical treatise written by Li Zongwu, which means setting one's mind to be ready to play hard, without respect towards common virtue.)

Some people said that Yu Zhongye finally turned against Sheng-Yu interests and made a deal with Hua Neng at the cost of destroying Sheng-Yu. Others said Chairman Yu was just taking an insignificant business job, so that he could not only distract himself from his current troubles, but also gain more working experience. Without a doubt, this would greatly increase the chances of greater promotions in the future if someday Yu Zhongye wanted to return to his work in the public institute. After all, he was a capable man with ambitions.

However, people's passion for rumors and gossip faded rapidly after just a few days. Any complicated story always had an end someday.

Sometimes in his spare time, Xing Ming browsed the internet for news on Yu Zhongye since he had nothing to do with the outcome. Curiosity always tickled him, and he had an urge to ask Yu Zhongye if his resignation was partly because of him or if he had already paved the path for himself so that he would be free of choices.

Once Xing Ming had asked him indirectly in bed and Yu Zhongye smiled without denying anything. He said one thing.

"I won't be an official in a prosperous era."

Liao Hui's case was completely settled a year later. Like the old saying stated, "sometimes in light of a sudden great power, prospering means its strength while declining means its instant fall." Boss Liao, the once famous and wealthy owner of Sheng-Yu, was now imprisoned, not for any crimes related to environmental contamination, but for bribery, corruption, contract fraud and so on. He was sentenced to eighteen years for several crimes.

Before Xing Ming could get ready to go for an interview, he was summoned to the chairman's office once again. But this time a complete stranger was waiting for him.

The new chairman of Pearl Station was Zhao Gang, a man in his fifties with a pair of big eyes, thick lips, and a square face. All his features made him look quite like a religious and dignified bodhisattva.

This new chairman, Chairman Zhao was an insightful and capable man though he was a far cry from his predecessor in appearance.

It was said that he was good at writing and painting, as well as playing the saxophone. Later, a number of female hosts started to admire him after he performed at the commendation meeting of Pearl Station.

Chairman Zhao was an amicable leader with a good sense of humor. He invited Xing Ming to sit down first and praised his devotion to the job where he'd risked his life at times to finish a task. He continued by commenting on Xing Ming's stunning work in hosting both TV shows and taking interviews that were worthy of rewards. Chairman Zhao told Xing Ming that he would like to see the hosts at the Station become bolder and more ambitious like wild horses and let their voices be heard. He didn't want them to be submissive and timid like a parrot that only dared to repeat what they were told.

“I know you have been punished for a while because of the on-air incident but now you’ve finally been ‘released.’ If you left the job of *Oriental TV Line* to others, you could come back to host *Pearl Line*.”

Xing Ming had already known about Luo You’s resignation. Luo You, the young, brilliant talent who came to the Station with pride and fame, had left quietly and hadn’t shown up in public again.

Seeing Xing Ming staring at him blankly, Chairman Zhao smiled, “So what do you think? *Pearl Line* is already well-established and has enough popularity and reputation while *Oriental TV Line* is just starting from the beginning. Besides, I’m much more generous than Chairman Yu. I don’t need you to be responsible for the program’s profits and losses and you’ll get a fair share of your salary.”

It had been one year since Xing Ming worked with Yu Zhongye and he learned to be more tactful by playing hard to get and pretending to be modest.

He said, on one hand, it would be a little bit hard to be responsible for the most famous *Pearl Line* because of his lack of knowledge and experience. Meanwhile *Oriental TV Line* needed a brand-new start and mainly focused on the domestic news.

He would be happy to start over with it again as both a producer and TV host.

Yu Zhongye soon adapted to his job as the CEO. In the past, he was in charge of thousands of people, and now his task was basically the same in this big company, just scaled up. However, he always kept a poker face and stayed aloof to most things that were irrelevant to the job. As the head of a corporation as well as a government official, he had now completely cast off his mental burdens and would occasionally accept media interviews.

On the show called *Asian Entrepreneurs* in East Asian Channel, the female host likened Yu Zhongye’s resignation to an emperor’s abdication, praising his generosity and thoughtfulness.

Yu Zhongye denied the analogy with a smile, saying that he’d actually realized his gift as a businessman when Pearl Station started innovating in the past. At that time, some of the subsidiary corporations he started made great achievements in the market. Although the success of these small companies was just the fruit of a few small efforts, he knew that one day he would challenge himself by running real businesses.

The conversation went on smoothly while the female host periodically burst into laughter. In the end, she even admitted that Yu Zhongye was truly a “charismatic chairman” just as most people said. If he was still the chairman of a TV station, she would have given up her current position and come under his leadership.

Standing outside of the studio, Xing Ming held a cup of hot coffee. He was waiting for Yu Zhongye to visit his mother after the interview ended. During the waiting time, he received a WeChat message from Xiao-*laoshi*, who had once taught at Dong Li Primary School. She told him that a new school building was

already on schedule, the old facilities had been improved, and more students were coming to school. After all the incidents, it was fortunate that this primary school was still alive and had even got better. Xiao-*laoshi* also told him that they'd received a donation by a company led by President Ma, the new president of the Red Cross Committee. Not only had the buildings been renovated, but they had also been equipped with the latest Apple computers.

The newly appointed President Ma was a responsible man who always did his best to offer help to those in desperate need of support. The first thing he did when he came to power was to disclose the bills used by the local government during the Yunnan earthquake. He received great admiration and praise from the public. As a journalist who was always critical to the news stories, Xing Ming suspected that action was mostly just to regain the reputation of the Red Cross. Xiao-*laoshi* then added that Liu-*laoshi* had almost recovered from his stroke and was able to walk and speak now. He'd told her that he had been blessed by his students despite his own misfortune and asked her to convey his gratitude to Xing Ming.

A sense of guilt rushed to Xing Ming's mind and almost made him drop the phone.

He'd also heard that Gao Feng had recovered and was currently employed by government agencies. Now he was focusing on public health work.

Presently, Professor Xia was a free consultant with the Kangle Company. He hadn't received a long imprisonment sentence. Once his one-year sentence had ended, he was released. His liver cancer drug passed the phase III trial and was in processing for its release into the market.

Everyone seemed to be better-off, and everything seemed to have some connections with him.

Xing Ming waited outside the broadcast studio until the interview with Yu Zhongye ended. He stood by the window and listened to whooshing sounds of the gusty winds outside. It had unexpectedly started to snow.

This was the first snow of the winter.

With his eyes fixed on the snowy landscape, Xing Ming tried to recall the conflicts between Yu Zhongye, Sheng-Yu, and the aftermath. Anyone who stayed in power in an interest group that faced a downfall would be the "sitting ducks." Hence it was a wise choice for Yu Zhongye to leave his political job and start a new business. His fame was restored, and his legacy and future would continue.

The more Xing Ming thought about the whole thing, the more he felt there was something fishy. Then he realized something. That cunning old fox may have outsmarted him.

But he'd just let it go. He was willing to be outwitted by this man for a lifetime.

Xing Ming paid another visit to Tang Wan once Yu Zhongye's interview ended. He parked the car somewhere far away in the shadows just as he'd always done it in the past and witnessed his mother's every move in silence.

However, he was not alone this time.

He'd once dreamed of having someone—Yu Zhongye, to be more specific—whom he loved by his side each time he drove the car somewhere. And now, this man was sitting in the front seat, and they took a drive together like every common pair of happy lovebirds.

After her divorce with Xiang Yong, Tang Wan quickly found a new husband, a stranger who she leisurely walked with while hooking her arm through his. She still looked beautiful and charming with rosy cheeks like a young woman in her youth.

It seemed like there was no need to get to the bottom of the reason his mother gave up trying to reverse his father's case years ago. Maybe she did it to keep her son safe or maybe she did it just for herself, as this woman had always acted like an uncaged canary. But based on the results, they had both given in to the pressure. There was basically no difference between them. Xing Ming didn't think that Tang Wan being a bad mother was disgraceful, nor did he feel as if he had been a noble man when he chose to stand aloof for the so-called "righteousness." But they had evened the score for those victims by having Sheng-Yu pay for all its foul deeds. He would continue to be a voice for the public; he would speak for those who suffered from injustice and oppression yet were forced to keep their mouths shut.

This was what his father would have really liked to see.

More than a decade after his father's death, Xing Ming had finally convinced himself to let go of that grievous past and move on.

Xing Ming gave her a long and tender stare until she left. The car moved again, going past the business district where numbers of skyscrapers towering into the clouds, through the historic lanes full of various art and crafts stores, and ultimately stopped in empty field with snow.

In the distance, Xing Ming raised his head and noticed a few plum blossoms that had bloomed. The clusters of red were just like blood stains on the pale snow. Lines of Himalayan cedar were standing against the cold and blustery winds, the wrath of winter, just a few miles away.

This place seemed quite unfamiliar, vast yet scarcely populated with only a few birds flying across the quiet sky. Perhaps it was somewhere in the suburbs.

Snow squalls blew across the land and soon turned the world into an endless whiteness. As the snow stopped abruptly, only the quiet sound of whistling winds over this clean and white land could be heard.

All of a sudden, Xing Ming honked the horn of the car madly, rushed out, and ran. He yelled like he was venting out all his grievances and rage. The noise he made was so loud that it broke the peaceful silence and woke up this world of ice. A flock of birds that perched on the branches of deodar cedars were startled and emerged from the trees. Loads of snow were shaken off and floated down from the treetops.

Getting out of the car as well, Yu Zhongye watched him from afar without

offering any comfort or advice. Instead, he slowly lit a cigarette.

A group of internet trolls had recently targeted Xing Ming after he became famous for his show. They never gave up attacking him verbally and made multiple posts to defame him. Sometimes, posts that accused him of being the son of a rapist would still pop up.

But Xing Ming felt completely calm. Time had worn away all his anger and sorrow. He finally could say goodbye to that young boy who always carried bitterness and hatred over ten years ago.

He was himself, but not *him* from the past, exactly.

Finally, it was the time to cast off the darkness and embrace the bright sun without shame or guilt. He could become a man who lived his life with all his dignity and pride. He could be like any normal person without being called a "freak."

Ernest Hemingway once said, "The world is a fine place and worth fighting for and I hate very much to leave it."

The first time Xing Ming heard of this line was in a film that was quite pessimistic towards the nature of human beings. Although one of the characters only agreed with the second half of Hemingway's words, Xing Ming thought differently.

Since this world isn't so good, and since this world isn't so bad, it's still worth a fight.

"Are you ready?" Yu Zhongye asked, finishing his smoke as he walked toward Xing Ming. "Where to?"

"Shao'ai is coming back for dinner tonight so let's go home early."

A smile of satisfaction appeared on Xing Ming's face. He grabbed Yu Zhongye's hand and drew it to his lips. Like a man addicted to drowning in pleasure, he took a deep drag of the cigarette in the other's hand.

As the blazing sunset with its gold and purple radiance projected onto the blossoming clouds, they walked side by side into the shadows and darkness of the night.

Bonus Chapter 1

One Family

Xing Ming didn't hear any noise when Yu Zhongye entered the room.

After coming back from an international business trip a day earlier than expected, Yu Zhongye went straight home without informing Xing Ming in advance. He pushed open the door and saw that Xing Ming had perched himself in the sunroom balcony and was reading a book.

The weather was pleasant, with beams of sunlight reflecting off the roof, penetrating into the room, and pouring onto Xing Ming like a spotlight. He seemed to be afire with a faint golden halo illuminating his soft, black hair. Bathed by the beams, the young man in a white shirt looked like a student.

Xing Ming had left his hair unchanged ever since the return of *Oriental TV Line*, not too long and not too short. His hair would be sprayed before the TV program began and he would look like an elegant elite in a professional business suit. In contrast, while at home, he would let his hair down and looked much younger. He had to check in with the producer every time he made a hairstyle change and tell him in precise detail how much of his hair would be cut—as the host of *Oriental TV Line*, his personal image couldn't be changed at will.

"What are you looking at? You're so focused." Yu Zhongye walked up to him and asked.

Xing Ming finally realized this man was back when the shadow of the man came into view. He took off his earphones and looked at Yu Zhongye with a beaming smile of satisfaction.

It was a wide and innocent smile revealing white teeth and it etched into Yu Zhongye's mind and eyes, like a sun-touched flower or a glaring flame.

That was a long time ago but even to this day, that smile was the main reason he couldn't wait to come back home.

Lifting Xing Ming's chin, Yu Zhongye leaned over and kissed him.

Once their lips touched each other lightly and invitingly, they were too intimate to separate though it was just a greeting on the lips without too much tongue-on-tongue contact. Their eyes were open and engrossed and they both savored this momentary soft kiss with relish.

After a few gentle tugs on each other's lips, Yu Zhongye's eyes bore into Xing Ming's and he asked, "Miss me, huh?"

"Yeah," Xing Ming took a little bite of Yu Zhongye's lower lip, staring back at him, grinning, "Missed you so much."

They hadn't seen each other for a while, so the long-awaited kiss was ravishing, sensual, and lasting, stirred by the feeling of nostalgia, longing, and melancholy. As his tongue slid along Yu Zhongye's lips to the tip of his tongue, Xing Ming became absorbed and melted in the kiss faithfully, like a kid secretly licking a candy. Just a light kiss was enough for Xing Ming, he intended to resume reading. Yu Zhongye however, got caught in the heat of the moment and was fully turned on. One of his hands snuck down Xing Ming's body and reached for his nether regions, while the other hand forcefully held the back of his head to prevent him from retreating. He started sucking and biting, his aggressive and passionate kiss becoming quite overpowering as if he was eager to swallow Xing Ming whole.

They had spent countless "adult nap-times" together, some were pleasing, while others were painful. But all these experiences became lessons that told Xing Ming this particular kiss from Yu Zhongye was a pretty dangerous signal—like an identifiable warning left by a predator chasing after its prey.

After struggling in vain for a while, Xing Ming had little choice but to bite Yu Zhongye on the lips. The pain finally made him release Xing Ming, who escaped from his arms at once and swiftly sprang away. His face was flushed, breathing was labored, and head was spinning, but the materials and books were still tightly held in his arms. He glared at Yu Zhongye, his eyes showed firm refusal, "I have a test tomorrow."

Wiping his bruised lips with his thumb, an amused Yu Zhongye smiled saying, "Fine, I won't touch you." He sat on the couch that Xing Ming once occupied and raised one of his arms. Then leaving space for Xing Ming to snuggle, he summoned him, "Come and sit. Do your test review here."

Doubts plagued him. Xing Ming was wavering between the two— whether to believe that this cunning old fox was indeed a man of integrity, a man of his word, wise and powerful; or to suspect that he turned out to be "Satan in disguise," an indecent jerk who always craved sex. He asked tongue in cheek, seeking a word of honor from Yu Zhongye, "You're not joking with me, right? A promise is a promise?"

"You have my word," Yu Zhongye confirmed in earnest with a slight nod.

After Xing Ming finally leaned into his arms, he moved his hands gently over his face, saying, "Pulled an all-nighter again? You look exhausted and even skinnier."

"Yeah… I've never failed a test before. But if I just passed this postgraduate study by the skin of my teeth, I'd feel ashamed." Xing Ming nodded.

He registered for a postgraduate study course in Journalism while keeping his job as a host in *Oriental TV Line*. Although the courses were quite easy, the task as a TV host for live broadcasting was grueling. Xing Ming skipped a lot of classes, but since the date for the test was coming, he had to spend some time reading up on it.

Moments before he'd just been reviewing the courses while listening to the music, but now he was laying his head on Yu Zhongye's chest, finding the most comfortable spot to sit, and cuddling him. Taking out one of his earphones, he turned around and shared with Yu Zhongye, "Listen."

It was a new song played on loop, when it got to the chorus, the voice of the singer was bright and warm, and the melody sounded pleasant. After listening for a while, Yu Zhongye asked while bringing a smile to his lips, “Shao’ai?”

These days, Yu Shao’ai was swamped with work while preparing for a musical talent show which was best known as a C-Pop singing competition. It served as a channel to scout outstanding, qualified, and skillful singer-songwriters who were capable of writing their own lyrics, composing their own melodies, and singing their own songs. This particular song was created by Yu Shao’ai specifically for the competition and it had been sent to be recorded by a professional recording studio. Yu Zhongye was a neglectful father, while Xing Ming, as Yu Shao’ai’s other “daddy,” had a better understanding on how to show love to their kid. Meanwhile Yu Shao’ai was quite aware of his plan and had even invited him out for basketball games a few times.

Maybe due to his well-off family, this kid wasn’t keen on becoming famous while other competitors threw all their hats in the ring and struggled to curry favor with the director. The wealthy ones bribed the man with money while the good-looking ones just slept with him in exchange for a chance to win in this rigged game. Covert bribery went under the cloak of close contact between the director and the contestants; after all, a fair exchange was not robbery. However, Yu Shao’ai was completely out of this “Game for Fame,” and just seemed to enjoy this competition for fun. Unexpectedly, the director appreciated Yu Shao’ai’s stunning looks and decided to take him as the seeded player and train him to be the winning singer with full resources while purposefully trying to build up a public persona for him during the show. To develop a well-designed persona, the director asked Yu Shao’ai to cooperate with the team and do a musical performance based on the story they designed. In the fabricated story, Yu Shao’ai was a young teenager, who was infatuated with his girlfriend. He developed his music together with her and suffered from a miserable past as his girl perished from cancer.

He was a handsome boy, a young man loyal to his lover, and more importantly, they would drop a hint that he was single. The director reckoned it would definitely work well.

Yet strangely enough, when the director was putting on an act to complete the touching story and did it with exaggerated tears crawled over his wrinkled face, Yu Shao’ai just stayed immersed in the music. As the music ended, he firmly made it clear that he was just a student with no powerful connections, no wealth, and no sentimental stories, and he would not work with the team to fake this story as it was just an act of sheer folly.

In fact, *Entertainment News* at Pearl Station owned several music reality TV programs, but since Yu Shao’ai didn’t want to rely on his father, he’d chosen to go to the East Asian Channel without telling anyone in advance.

After the downfall of Sheng-Yu, Hong Wanliang remained bedridden. Out of a silent understanding that Yu Shao’ai and Xing Ming knew how to handle the whistleblower letter—they never mentioned it to each other’s face and pretended that nothing had happened before. But it was quite clear in Xing Ming’s mind that Yu Shao’ai was a bit annoyed that his father had been so obsessed with his little lover that he had consequently given up his job.

Obviously, they needed to mend their broken father-and-son relationship now, so Xing Ming decided to give them a hand. He beat around the bush, mentioning that in recent days he had heard from a friend talking about Shao'ai. It was said that Yu Shao'ai had exerted himself to take the victory in the music reality show of East Asian Channel, but since it might not be a fair competition, it would be better if Yu Zhongye, the former chairman of Pearl Station, told East Asian Channel to "take care" of his son during the show. After all, connections were of paramount importance in work, though the goal was not to turn this into a rigged game. By doing so, fairness of the competition would be ensured given his father's reputation and title.

Yu Zhongye contradicted that conclusion and said in an unbothered tone, "The son of Yu Zhongye will live off the fruits of his own labor."

Without saying anything further, Xing Ming kept his head down and re-immersed himself in the book. Father-and-son relationships were always complicated, let alone the paradox of fatherhood. Onlookers saw most of the game, and as an outsider, Xing Ming knew it well considering his own family. Untying the knot in their hearts or resolving the bitter conflicts was no easy feat.

The warmth coming from both being cuddling of Yu Zhongye and the sunlight made him drowsy. In the blink of an eye, his eyelids involuntarily closed and the book in his hand slipped to the ground.

"Chairman Yu—" Phoebe's voice burst in as she barged through the door of the room with the phone Yu Zhongye left in the study.

Yu Zhongye placed one finger on his lips in a "shushing" gesture, to make Phoebe stay quiet.

With eyebrows furrowed, Xing Ming gave a sudden jerk of his body in Yu Zhongye's arms. Apparently, he was in a light sleep and could easily be woken up by any noise or sound.

A hand gently moved over his face as if to comfort him and it waved Phoebe off.

"Chairman Yu, it's from a leader, a real one." Instead of leaving, Phoebe stepped into the sunroom. The phone kept buzzing and she'd recognized the name appearing on the ID screen. It was from a high-up whose name couldn't be addressed disrespectfully by her.

Clearly it was going to be a long chat over the phone. Yu Zhongye lowered his eyes and stared at the man catnapping in his arms before telling Phoebe softly, "Tell him that I'll call him back later."

He stopped her before she left and told her to bring a blanket.

It had been a while since the last time he enjoyed a sound sleep, but that predicament wasn't due to the annoying problems that used to cause butterflies in his stomach, but because he was occupied with work. Xing Ming was busy hosting live broadcasts in the studio while Yu Zhongye was at home and tied up with studying for the test when the other man finally got home after his business trips.

Their timetables were never in sync, hence there was no time for them to spend the night together, let alone dine together.

Wrapped up in the blanket, Xing Ming fell into a deep slumber in Yu Zhongye's arms. It was relaxed and soothing. He tossed around a little bit and rested half of his body on Yu Zhongye's arm. Despite the numbness and stiffness of his limb, Yu Zhongye remained motionless and kept his eyes closed. Only when the man in his arms woke up from the sweet dream, did he finally open his eyes and get serious.

The sun was dipping down, perching on the roof of a distant house with a glow drenched in red ochre.

The soft gust of the spring day swirled around as the sunbeams poured down warming everything it touched. Yu Shao'ai's love song was playing over and over again on the cell phone with one of the earbuds in Xing Ming's ear and the other in Yu Zhongye's. They were listening to the same song, sung by that naughty, lovable young man. He was singing and murmuring tenderly, his voice passing like a whispering wind, delivering a sense of fondness and affection that warmed up the air between Xing Ming and Yu Zhongye.

Lifting his chin, Xing Ming tilted his head backward to gazing at Yu Zhongye's face above his own. The man's eyes shut and the long, dark eyelashes brushing against his lower eyelid seemed quite enchanting. A few fine lines were carved in the corners of his eyes, like the folds on a piece of velvet, yet they didn't give away the traces on the face left by his age but endowed him with charm. A beam of sunlight cast on his face and gave him more of a detached and divine look, he appeared completely different from the man of dignified bearing that he used to be.

A slight movement from Xing Ming made Yu Zhongye open and lower his eyes to stare at him, "Already awake?"

This cunning old fox was a man who would never abstain from sex: once he was on bed, the beast inside him burst forth, rampaging with passion and enthusiasm, yet he was also a man of his word, and a promise was a promise. Xing Ming remembered that he'd once been bold as brass and asked Yu Zhongye to punish Ol' Chen and break up with Luo You. It turned out that he did everything Xing Ming asked for instead of just making an empty promise. Rather than a using deceptive lie or playing a clever trick, Yu Zhongye had kept his word of honor.

Thinking about this, Xing Ming was suddenly pleased and straddled Yu Zhongye with his own ulterior motives.

He lightly brushed his lips against Yu Zhongye's, and they connected becoming engrossed in lingering hot kisses. Once Yu Zhongye started responding to him, Xing Ming moved nimbly, biting his chin, ripping apart his shirt, kissing his neck, then his Adam's apple, his collarbone, and his firm chest. In the end, his lips stopped at his nipple, gently licking, and nibbling it over and over again.

Although the other man appeared indifferent, Xing Ming reached out with his hands toward Yu Zhongye's groin—

One hand suddenly grasping Xing Ming's claw, Yu Zhongye reacted quickly

while maintaining a solemn expression, calm and wordless.

Instead of withdrawing his hand, Xing Ming continued rubbing and teasing the man's member even with his pants on. He displayed a proud smile and looking at him with one eyebrow slightly raised, "You promised that you wouldn't touch me, but I never said I wouldn't touch you."

Yu Zhongye tossed Xing Ming over and pressed himself on top of him. His breathing had suddenly gotten heavier, and he gave Xing Ming a ferocious stare like he was a monster that wanted to swallow Xing Ming alive.

They were so close to each other that he could clearly feel the hot breath and the thundering heartbeat of the man in front of him. Without a doubt, he had successfully gotten Yu Zhongye aroused and would be brutally fucked by the man once his clothes were stripped off. Xing Ming's eyes darted for escape and soft words were uttered from his mouth as he begged for mercy, "I… I really have to take a test tomorrow."

Like a bunny who provoked a tiger yet was later frightened by the rage of this beast, Xing Ming was exasperating, but, cute.

Anyone that was close to Host Xing knew he had "two sides"—one side was how he displayed himself in front of the audience, but he was a totally different person when facing people whom he knew well. With his audience he was sharp, incisive, and generous, capable of arguing passionately and eloquently; to his acquaintances, he was taciturn and callous, preserving his "reputation" as the *Ice Prince*.

But actually, there was a hidden third side to his personality.

It only appeared when he was with Yu Zhongye. He had a better sense of humor when he talked, and he laughed more when he felt loved. Since he hadn't felt loved for a decade or so, when it finally came back, he'd occasionally act in a pouty way like a spoiled cat, waving his claws and pretending to scratch. But Yu Zhongye was fond of the dependence and intimacy in this relationship and always enjoyed pampering Xing Ming.

Gazing at Xing Ming, Yu Zhongye furrowed his eyebrows. Even when the burning fires of lust deep inside his eyes extinguished and only cold embers remained, he was still reluctant to let him go. Their eyes were locked a long time before Yu Zhongye finally laughed out loud and scolded Xing Ming, "You little brat."

Finally, he let him get up.

Yu Zhongye was fully turned on and his pants had tented. Despite his victory, Xing Ming had a sense of guilt. He whispered in Yu Zhongye's ear, saying, "*Laoshi*, I'll eat you out."

"Eh," Yu Zhongye acknowledged with a murmur in a low voice. Xing Ming slid down the man's body, untied his pants and the hot manhood promptly popped out and swatted Xing Ming heavily in the face.

Bonus Chapter 2

When We Were Both Young

The meeting place for Xing Ming's class reunion was the newly opened KTV, Nova. It was similar to others of its kind and could be used as a private room for people to drink, sing songs together, and catch up, but for him the meaning was different.

This would be the first time that Xing Ming was attended a class reunion since his graduation. As a popular host with *Pearl Line,* he was a natural focus of attention and might take the limelight away from the bride-to-be.

Li Mengyuan was getting married, and the groom was definitely not Xiang Xiaobo. While the story of planting flowers in cow manure is very inspiring for the cow manure, it could destroy the life of the flower. Xiang Xiaobo had been trying hard to change these days. He had quit gambling, his life of debauchery, and even being lazy. Regardless, Li Mengyuan had politely declined his proposal with barely a second thought.

Before the wedding, Li Mengyuan had sent a WeChat message to her college class group chat to invite them all to a reunion. Although it had been three years since graduation, she thought that this would be the perfect opportunity to hand out wedding invitations.

While Li Mengyuan was in college, she had been considered one of the "school beauties." Although Xing Ming had always been indifferent to her attractiveness, many of her other male classmates used to go to bed thinking about her. Now that their "class goddess" was sending out wedding invitations, many of the unmarried bachelors felt like their dreams had been shattered. With her announcement, the group chat immediately blew up on the spot as they started discussing who was the lucky groom who would be buying the ring on her finger, plating her long hair, and getting her a wedding dress.

The classmates all agreed to show up out of respect for the bride, but upon arrival only thirty percent flocked to Li Mengyuan, while the rest went to see Xing Ming. They wanted to see if their former classmate, now celebrity, had changed.

Although Host Xing was super busy for what felt like lifetimes, he didn't put on any airs and arrived right on schedule just like he promised. As soon as Xing Ming stepped into the private room, his former classmates swarmed him, asking for autographs and photos. He felt obligated to respond since it seemed like he was returning home. In the past, he would have put on a noble act like he was a man among cranes, but now it was different. Xing Ming's words and actions were calm, gentle, and completely unpretentious. He seemed very similar to his father.

Ever since Xing Ming had entered through the door, a man had stared at him.

Xing Ming noticed the burning gaze not far away, so he turned to face the man,

nodded, then asked him, “Has life been good?”

The man, Gao Lian, was shocked that Xing Ming took the initiative to address him. Sitting next to him, an overweight man surnamed Wang, took that moment to interject. “A’Lian has recently started making a drug that’s similar to Viagra. It also has a stimulation effect.”

(Note: The A’ prefix denotes familiarity, similar to the English suffix -y in the way it applies to nicknames.)

Around them, the students exclaimed “Whoa,” with varying levels of interest. Gao Lian elbowed Wang, before standing up to greet the crowd. Carrying a LV bag, wearing Hermes shoes, and dressing like someone in public relations, he looked way more eye-catching than the host from Pearl Station. Gao Lian fell into a dignified position and made a “generous” offer, “If there are any male students who’d like our product, just say ‘hello,’ I’ll give you a discount!”

“I’ve heard of that product. That must be from that large American company.” Xing Ming had heard Li Mengyuan mention that Gao Lian now served as a medical representative from a pharmaceutical company. He spent all day traveling to major hospitals to meet with chief physicians in various departments. Men usually did not have any advantages in selling medicine for a simple reason, most of the medical heads were males and therefore weren’t attracted to them. Female medical representatives usually dressed up to highlight their beauty but since male representative did not have that advantage, they could only rely on offering food and drinks. As such, only a few years after graduation Gao Lian’s body had grown soft.

Turning back, Gao Lian replied somewhat sardonically, “How is it good? Now I have a beer belly.” Then Gao Lian shook his head and sighed, “I can’t bear to look back on the past.”

Back then, Gao Lian had also been tall, thin, and handsome. Amongst girls, he had only been slightly less popular than Xing Ming.

Today, he was dressed in a professional suit and had slick-backed oiled hair, a powdered face, and noticeable weight gain. He no longer looked like a youngster.

During school, Gao Lian had been very hostile towards Xing Ming. Maybe it was because of the old saying, “two tigers cannot live on one mountain.” At that time, Gao Lian deliberately found some delinquents to surround and beat Xing Ming up but there were so many that he was clearly outnumbered. Ruling out the beating as a cheap victory, Gao Lian decided against going through with it. Instead, he finally decided to lock Xing Ming in an anatomy classroom. Arrogant boys weren’t popular with their peers, and Gao Lian didn’t want the death penalty, he just wanted to see Xing Ming panic and beg for mercy.

School was just starting the next day when a group of girls entering the anatomy classroom started screaming. When the professor opened the classroom door, he found Xing Ming soundly sleeping among a pile of human bones and organs.

The professor asked Xing Ming how he got in that situation. If Gao Lian was

implicated, he would be severely punished due to bringing delinquents to school to beat someone up and then locking him in a classroom. However, Xing Ming didn't mention anything. Fights were nothing to him, so he simply said that he'd stayed late and hadn't noticed that the door was locked.

After that incident, Gao Lian's attitude toward Xing Ming subtly changed. In class, they almost never spoke and the few times they did, Gao Lian always spoke harsh words. But when they played on the school sports team together, they had a tacit understanding. Xing Ming would sometimes struggle with leg cramps. At those times, Gao Lian would willing help to carry him off court, all while cursing him for being useless.

Actually, Gao Lian had been a better basketball player than Xing Ming and he'd been selected for a youth sports school straight out of primary school.

By this time, a group of people had gathered inside the Nova private room. Gao Lian greeted Wang, then switched placed with him so he could sit next to Xing Ming. Then Gao Lian asked Xing Ming, "Remember when we were playing on the school team together? You injured your knee, so I carried you to the infirmary."

Although his body was out of shape, his facial features remained the same. Xing Ming stared deep in Gao Lian's pair of eyes, trying hard to recall, before finally saying, "I forgot about that."

Xing Ming hadn't held a grudge from that year, so he really had forgotten. During that period, he was full of hostility and anger, and he vented it while playing sports so he wouldn't redirect it at other people. People are strange and whether they remember the good or bad, usually depends on their mood. To Xing Ming, that day had been successful even without his participation and he subconsciously didn't want to recall that year.

However, Xing Ming still acted polite and took the initiative to ask, "Why didn't you go to work at a hospital?"

"After taking an internship for a while, I found that it was too hard to stay at a hospital. We weren't paid enough and were worked too hard." Gao Lin smiled, "You didn't end up working at a hospital either, right?"

Xing Ming also grinned but his smile was shallow. Then he continued, asking, "And now? Don't medical representatives also suffer? Or do you earn more so you don't mind as much?"

Gao Lian shook his head again, "I don't earn much and it's actually even harder doing this job. When there are too many people meeting the doctor, I can't go in. I have to wait outside the clinic and sometimes end up waiting all day. I once tried to meet a pediatric doctor during lunch break, so I gave him a red envelope but a woman with a child saw me. She thought I was trying to jump the line and slapped me in the face."

(Note: A red packet with money in it. It can be given as a gift but in this case, it was most likely a bribe.)

Bonus Chapter 3

The Fleeting Times

Yu Shao'ai had arrived home with his luggage bag and house keys. When he opened the door and entered, two housemaids were busy doing the housework and didn't notice him. Only the man sitting on the sofa in the living room, reading a book, raised his eyes once he heard a noise. It was his father, Yu Zhongye.

Their eyes connected and Yu Shao'ai asked as if it was just a routine question, "Where's my 'stepmom'?"

"Still asleep," Yu Zhongye answered naturally.

"At this time?" Yu Shao'ai asked in surprise, it was almost noon. He remembered that when he went on business trips with Xing Ming several times in the past, the most memorable thing about him was that he rarely slept—he spent the day taking interviews and stayed up all night to write the news scripts. Even late at night he called his team members online for discussions. He almost buried himself in the journalistic work, fully dedicated even though he was burning the candle at both ends.

"Let him sleep a bit longer." Yu Zhongye took a sip of the tea. Then after putting down the cup, he added, "He's just too tired from last night."

Yu Shao'ai was quite sure that if he were the one drinking the tea at this moment, he would have spat the tea out. He was shocked by the fact that this cunning old fox was not only a pervert but also a shameless individual.

Though Yu Zhongye seemed to see through to his son's concealed grievances, he was unconcerned. His eyes fixed on his son's traveling bag, and he asked, "Why are you here?"

"I have nowhere else to go," Yu Shao'ai replied before explaining the whole story. His previous landlord had gotten his girlfriend pregnant, so he had to marry her and took back the house from his renter as soon he could. This left Yu Shao'ai without a place to stay and with the Chinese New Year festival coming, he didn't have time to find a better place.

"You want to live at home?" He could sense the cold indifference in Yu Zhongye's voice. He was the one who had kicked his son out, for good reasons, and he had no intention of allowing him to stay.

"Just until the Lantern festival. When my friend comes back from his hometown, I'll move into his house for a while."

"It hasn't been a long since you returned, and now you already have a friend like this?"

“I have lots of friends even when I don’t come back,” Yu Shao’ai shrugged his shoulders, “You’re underestimating me. I’ve got friends all over the world.”

“Fine.” Finally, a smile appeared on Yu Zhongye’s face and with an air of approval, he said, “Take your stuff upstairs. I’ll have Phoebe cook something for you.”

“I’m not here to be an asshole, so I won’t bother you guys. I’ll do it on my own.” He rolled up his sleeves and headed to the kitchen after putting down his belongings. After years of living alone abroad, Yu Shao’ai had already learned how to take care of himself. Chinese food was his “signature dishes” since most of his ex-girlfriends were Chinese. As he rummaged through the raw ingredients in the refrigerator, he found ribs, brisket, eggs, carrots, tomatoes, and Argentinean red shrimp… The meat and vegetables were all prepared, so he planned to make a feast and completely took over Phoebe’s work.

Yu Shao’ai was nimbly beating the eggs in the bowl when two arms suddenly grabbed him by his waist. They were quite aggressive as they embraced him tightly, and even sneakily slid down into his trousers. Bewildered by the intimacy, Yu Shao’ai stiffened. The man behind him leaned towards him and gently used his lips to brush his neck, teasing him, “*Laoshi*…”

Now he finally understood— still disoriented from the fatigue of last night, Host Xing had mistaken him for his father.

Then he heard a light cough from behind him. It was a clear warning from his father.

Yu Shao’ai responded with his eyes rolled, while Xing Ming finally woke up. *This cunning old fox was such an unreasonable man*. In the past, they had sex regardless of where they were or the people they were with, but now he was actually jealous of his own son. Pretending to be calm, he withdrew his hands from Yu Shao’ai’s waist and coughed awkwardly, “You’re really good at cooking.”

“Yeah, I’ve had a lot of practice.” Yu Shao’ai stated with a captivating smile, deliberately ignoring the cautionary look in Yu Zhongye’s eyes.

They enjoyed brunch at the table together. The eve of the lunar new year was coming, and people online were almost overwhelmed by the information about the Spring Festival Gala. Yu Shao’ai asked Xing Ming, “Didn’t the Station invite you to be the host?”

“Yes, but I declined,” Xing Ming replied with a shake of his head.

A few days later, the deputy director personally came to invite him to the Spring Festival Gala again.

Xing Ming knew it was probably because Yu Zhongye made a compromise, but the truth was he felt too embarrassed to meet people because of the disaster with the class reunion just before the new year. In the end, he made the decision to give up this opportunity and found an excuse saying that he was a harsh young man, and no

one would like to see his irritated face when they celebrated the happy new year.

After getting used to the rumors and power struggles, he was suddenly fed up with being restrained by the shackles of fame and money, and no longer pursued a life where he needed to show off all the time. He even surprised himself…

This family of three seldom spent time together enjoying dinner at table. While Yu Shao'ai kept rambling on, Xing Ming enjoyed the food in silence while Yu Zhongye just responded with a few words. Then call from a director at the Station interrupted their conversation. He said they were going to film a video in the form of personal interviews that offered a chance for all the TV hosts at the Station to be on camera. It was going to be shot at the host's home.

Glancing over at Yu Zhongye, Xing Ming knew that since disclosing one's sexual orientation as a homosexual was forbidden, Yu Zhongye wouldn't bother showing up on camera, but this was a different situation when Xing Ming was encouraged to partake in this activity. Their status as lovers wasn't a hidden secret in the social bubble where they lived and worked. After all, one could never hide elephants in mouseholes, and he didn't need to keep it under the table. Needless to say, Yu Zhongye was no longer Chairman Yu, but Boss Yu and he had nothing to be afraid of, even if their relationship was revealed to the public.

The director recommended that it should be filmed at home when they joined together for a family reunion and made dumplings. The New Year's festival was a day for harmony, prosperity, and peace. Shooting the scene this way was not only a way to show that admirable and aloof TV hosts were actually average people, but it would also win over the audience's favor.

Nonetheless, he understood that Yu Zhongye and Yu Shao'ai wouldn't show up in front of the viewers, hence he offered the warm suggestion that Xing Ming's mother might join them on screen.

He had lost contact with his mother Tang Wan since her marriage. It wasn't his grudge that curbed him from restoring their relationship—despite reconciliation and forgiveness, he felt that there was something that was deeply rooted in his mind, like a seed of hatred, a thorn of revenge, which incited him and made him sick. Compared to his so-called "mother," these two men seemed much more like family to him. After a few moments of silence as he held the phone, he compromised, "Hm, we'll talk about it later." With a sullen face, he hung up the phone.

Even though Yu Zhongye had no idea what conversation went on between the director and Xing Ming, he could read from Xing Ming's expression that the young man was upset. He asked, "What's wrong?"

"I don't want to make dumplings alone," With downcast eyes, Xing Ming finished off the rice and gave a resigned smile, "I'm full."

A family reunion? With who?

He had always kept this anticipation of a family reunion in his heart, however, even if he treasured it and preserved it carefully and lonely, it turned out to be an illusion anyway. It gradually wore off and vanished from his memory following the

passage of time.

If there was anywhere else to go, Yu Shao'ai would have never thought of coming back home. How could a straight man like him choose to live with two gay lovers rather than finding some girl outside and experiencing some romantic encounters? *What the heck am I doing here?* Even more than that, since these two men had fell in love with each other, they didn't care about the presence of any outsiders. Phoebe and Ol' Lin were the best examples of "outsiders" who had already got used to them. But Yu Shao'ai was different, he was still shocked at seeing two men cuddling each other and kissing right after coming downstairs.

However, what Yu Shao'ai didn't know was that during the year this couple rarely had time to be with each other—Yu Zhongye was always too busy to come back home, and Host Xing rarely had any spare time. Since they barely saw each other, they didn't have many chances to do "adult activities"

Soon New Year's Eve arrived and Yu Shao'ai arrived home early in the morning after going to town with a couple of his friends from the music band. He snuck into his bedroom and entered a deep sleep. It was late in the afternoon when he woke up and when he leisurely walked downstairs, he happened to see his father and Xing Ming playing Weiqi.

Playing Weiqi was a time-consuming game. When Xing Ming was still a student, his way of playing was quite aggressive and spontaneous, but since it had been a long period from the last time he played it, he didn't have the strength and confidence that he used to. Yu Zhongye however dealt with the game calmly and easily, and even sometimes got entertained by watching Xing Ming's flustered face and anxiety.

"Morning Dad." Yu Shao'ai called to his father in a bright, loud voice, yet his father only stared at the man in front of him, completely ignoring his own son's greeting.

"Morning, 'Mom,'" Yu Shao'ai turned to Xing Ming and called him.

Despite his effort to jest with the two of them, they were too engrossed in the Weiqi game to notice him. Although Yu Shao'ai didn't know much about Weiqi, he heard a saying that claimed, "A true gentleman should keep silent while watching a Weiqi game." Motivated by his curiosity, he approached them and took a closer look at the game, but the longer he watched them play, the more bored he became. In his view, it was considered as a hobby by only young kids or some really old people. For the former, it was a game for training one's mind, for the latter, it just helped to kill time. His father could be called as an old man, but Xing Ming, a man in his youth, was able to play with an old man for the whole afternoon, and even put off his invitation to a ball game. It sounded almost unbelievable.

After going back to his room, Yu Shao'ai changed into a fashionable look, preening like a beautiful peacock and went downstairs again. This time, instead of interrupting the two men who were still fully occupied the Weiqi game, he headed straight out without a word.

Xing Ming held his chin up with one hand. Even though he seemed to be thinking

about how to move for the next step, actually he was trying to figure out the latent message in Yu Zhongye's words. New Years was a time for people of the nation to celebrate and a day for family reunions. This cunning old fox truly wanted to keep his son with him tonight, but he felt too uncomfortable to talk about it because of their strained relationship.

Seeing his predestined defeat in the game, Xing Ming directly admitted defeat and freed up his mind from the game of Weiqi. Then he suggested they should do something that they could all participate in together.

Yu Zhongye looked into his eyes and smiled gently, "Let's make dumplings."

The family of three made dumplings for Chinese New Year. Xing Ming couldn't remember a time, even when his father Xing Hong was still alive, when his family did it. It was a dream that he never dared to imagine.

Xing Ming's great-grandfather had a home in the southern part of China, however, he was born and raised in the north, hence he clearly knew the customs of the Chinese New Year for people living in the north. They stuck couplets, set off firecrackers, made dumplings, and spent all night with their families. That was what most of the common families did on that day, but his family was an exception. Xing Hong was a workaholic when he was alive, who would never come home even during the New Year festival, whereas his mother Tang Wan was a woman who couldn't cook, therefore no one in his house would make dumplings. He often had to buy some frozen dumplings from the supermarket and finished them after they were cooked.

Later his father passed away and he never had the chance to celebrate the day. There hadn't been a real Spring Festival for him for decades.

However, even though he couldn't imagine such a wonderful and happy day, it didn't mean that he didn't care about it or didn't want to participate.

Otherwise, he would not have been so upset when he heard the director talking about filming them making dumplings. At that moment, he almost seemed like a withered flower.

Phoebe was on vacation and when they decided they were going to make dumplings, Boss Yu truly meant it; he kneaded the dough and stuffed the dumplings personally. Yu Shao'ai was stunned by this since he had never seen his father cooking for someone with his sleeves tied up and an apron on. Yet Xing Ming was not surprised. He walked over with pride and tied the apron for him.

His hands naturally wrapped around Yu Zhongye waist, his head lifted up as Yu Zhongye lowered his, and their lips touched each other as smiles bloomed on their faces.

Yu Shao'ai was shocked again and broke into a cold sweat. He quickly turned aside, complaining that this lovey-dovey couple really didn't care about what others thought when they were in love!

Slightly arching his back and standing at the table, Chairman Yu rolled out the

dumpling dough wrappers himself and he moved so swiftly that soon all the wrappers were spread on the rosewood dinner table. Since Yu Shao'ai hadn't grown up in China, he was rarely able to consume dumplings in a year, but he always cooked for himself so learning how to make dumplings was just a piece of cake. For Xing Ming, he didn't know how to cook, usually he ate Phoebe's and sometimes Yu Zhongye's meals and had no idea about how to make most of the things he tasted. But his interest in making dumplings encouraged him to take part in the molding process, so he pulled up his sleeves and decided to join them.

Although they were all making the dumplings, how they formed it and the results turned out to be completely different. Yu Zhongye was quite good at making respectable dumpling shapes, hence his dumplings looked delicate and extremely appetizing. Yu Shao'ai was a practical man and so were his dumplings, he often used thin wrappings and more stuffing, and sometimes would make them into various shapes like squares, a round-balls or hearts. Xing Ming's didn't look as good as those of Yu Zhongye or Yu Shao'ai. Maybe it was because he was originally from the south, but his dumplings were weird shapes and seemed more like ravioli wontons.

"Alas, young Xing-*laoshi*, as a native Chinese man, how could you make dumplings that look more misshapen than mine?" Yu Shao'ai drew closer to Xing Ming and put the flour on his face. "Well, I'll teach you."

Removing Yu Shao'ai's hand off his face, Xing Ming tried to avoid enraging that cunning old fox who was extremely petty, especially since he'd messed things up before. He didn't want to get himself into trouble again tonight. Without noticing the flour on his face, he explained seriously and clumsily, "As long as you can eat them, it doesn't matter how they look. After all, it all looks the same when it comes out."

"How could you say that? The look, the smell and the taste are all of importance to Chinese food. Look in particular are the top priority… Why don't you ask my dad what he likes about you?" Yu Shao'ai pinched Xing Ming's chin, turning his face smeared with flour toward Yu Zhongye, "Is it true that lovers all look the same when they turn off the light, or is he really into your pretty face?"

Looking straight at Xing Ming's cute face with the flour, Yu Zhongye smiled and didn't remind him of it.

Xing Ming shook off Yu Shao'ai and kept working on his dumplings with a serious face, but soon he realized his ugly dumplings were too soft to be shaped, so he approached Yu Zhongye again. With flour on his face, he earnestly tried to learn the ways of making dumplings from Yu Zhongye.

"Why have I failed?" Xing Ming murmured.

"Silly boy," Yu Zhongye lightly scraped the bridge of Xing Ming's nose and placed the flour on his hand onto Xing Ming's nose.

Host Xing had always looked cool and aloof, he was the kind of cool guy you would expect to read from some old-school shojo manga. He was indifferent yet

gorgeous, attracting lots of pretty girls in school. But now he looked like a completely different person and most interestingly, he was unaware of it.

After trying hard to keep a straight face for a while, Yu Shao'ai finally burst into laughter at seeing Xing Ming's confusion.

His father was also infected by his smile while Xing Ming finally realized what had happened by their laughter and wiped off his nose and face.

"Okay, so childish." Xing Ming feigning indignation, but he failed to fake a straight face and in the end they all laughed out loud.

Once all the dumplings were served, it was easy to recognize who made each one. Those made by Yu Zhongye still kept their great shapes and Xing Ming's were still good after being cooked but didn't look as nice as those of Yu Zhongye. However, Yu Shao'ai's dumpling ended up soggy and a few of them had running filling. His unique shaped dumplings were all messy.

Yu Shao'ai wasn't convinced and asking his dad, "Who has the best ones?"

Taking a look at his son, Yu Zhongye's eyes then fixed on his little lover, saying, "Ming-Ming has the most delicious ones."

It seemed like Yu Shao'ai fully understood the rank of importance in this family. After finishing the dinner, he disappeared quickly and went to stay up with his friends, leaving Xing Ming and Yu Zhongye at home to watch the Spring Festival Gala.

Strangely, when he was still the Chairman of the Station, Yu Zhongye almost never watched the Spring Festival Gala. In the past, the deputy chairman would be responsible for such significant events, so he never asked anything about it, but now after he left the Station, he had more spare time to watch it.

The people showing up on TV were still the same old faces that everyone knew, except for one new face that appeared only a few times. Xing Ming was supposed to be the one to take that role. Xing Ming asked, "If I presented as the host, would I be better than him?"

"No," Yu Zhongye responded.

Chairman Yu was a very fair man who was always impartial when it came to his work and his private life. He could praise him for making good dumplings, but he couldn't lie to him about his work. Unconvinced, Xing Ming only looked at the TV without speaking. After a few TV shows, it came to the part where the sponsors said happy new year to the audience and the host who showed up was Nan Ling. Without a doubt, Nan Ling was total eye candy. He behaved like one and acted like one, however, he was one of the most popular hosts at the Station due to his attractive-looking face. Once he appeared, all his fans online on Weibo went insane.

Xing Ming wasn't envious or jealous, but he focused on whether this man was going to read all the advertisements. After listening to him for a while, he found his accent had improved and he had clearly spent some effort in practicing and finally

succeeded with hard work.

It wouldn't take long to pay a New Year's call and another show started soon after. Xing Ming laughed out loud and was even amused by some of the boring jokes. Upon seeing this one could hardly tell he was an incisive TV host with a silver tongue in a news critic program.

Normally he put on a serious face, but actually he was just a young man in his twenties so there was no way he could hide his innocence and childishness in front of his older lover. Now Xing Ming watched TV while Yu Zhongye kept watching him. A witty skit was playing on screen called *Hope the Kid Will Have a Bright Future*, and a familiar actor posed a stupid joke which greatly amused Xing Ming as he cuddled up into Yu Zhongye's arms and grinned with all his white teeth.

Yu Zhongye lowered his eyes to the man in his arms, asking with a smile, "Is it funny?"

"Definitely," Xing Ming smiled sincerely, he really thought that each show was quite entertaining. It was the first time he enjoyed the new year with family members; the first since he was born. He could never forget the pain and suffering when he could only watch the Spring Festival Gala alone.

As expected, the end of the skit got very sentimental, promoting the Chinese virtue of good morality, and glorifying fatherly love.

Xing Ming stopped laughing. It'd been a while since he'd dreamed of his father, and he had to admit that it was a good thing. Previously, every time he dreamed about him, he felt like he was suffocating, all his muscles stiffened, as if he would soon die. Listening to the emotional music, Xing Ming looked up, staring at Yu Zhongye. Those distant yet pleasant memories clouded his vision as he tried to find something from Yu Zhongye's face, to put these pieces together and complete the puzzle based on the memories that flashed through his mind. All of a sudden, he said, "Cunning old fox, sometimes I feel like you're just like my dad."

"No nonsense." Yu Zhongye kissed Xing Ming's ear and his hand slipped to his underbelly, wrapped his member which was already dripping sticky liquid inside his hand.

Xing Ming felt much more comfortable. However, being stroked by that man wasn't enough and he felt a tingling sensation like ants were crawling all over his skin. He yearned for a more aggressive and strong penetration.

Foreigners always looked more mature. Xing Ming's eyes were blurry and so was the image of the idol on TV. Now all he wanted to see was Yu Zhongye's face.

"Take me… Turn me turn around."

"Baby, sit up," His body looked like an enchanted and tasty fruit to Yu Zhongye. Every time he fucked him, he could never resist the urge to take control of him and make him all his. Without any intention of waiting for Xing Ming to agree, Yu Zhongye buried his face in Xing Ming's shoulder and kissed him.

Trying hard to get over his lust, Xing Ming moved a few times, but his body was too energetic to hold still. Yu Zhongye used one hand to grab his waist and the other to hold his butt, lifting him up and down again and again. Even though such a position took him a lot of energy, Yu Zhongye looked completely relaxed. Once Xing Ming's entrance was slightly open, that would be the best time to change into another position.

"Let me finish the show…" There was a foreign band Xing Ming was fond of when he was a student, but the band disbanded and hadn't played since then. He didn't expect that this evening, Peart Station would invite them to sing together. While reunions did sometimes happen, it was very rare.

The old fox's interest had arrived, and Xing Ming struggled twice as he felt the hard object stand up, as his ass was being held. "Look at you," Yu Zhongye said while lifting up Xing Ming's ass and tearing off his pants. Yu Zhongye took lubricant from a side-cabinet and used two fingers to squeeze into Xing Ming's hole. He moved his fingers around a few times, but the inner walls didn't soften, so he became impatient. Grabbing Xing Ming's ass in one hand and his member with the other, he fed it into the hole.

The show hadn't ended but Xing Ming squealed. Yu Zhongye pinched the other man's waist, but it would be hard for him to sit down.

As Xing Ming chirped, he felt his hole fill with what felt like a hot piece of metal. It went straight into the depths of his abdominal cavity.

Yu Zhongye loosened his hand slightly, but his arm was still hooked around Xing Ming's waist. Then he commanded, "Move."

Xing Ming sat up and down a few times but because of their position, he couldn't move very much. However, since Yu Zhongye had already entered, he was no longer in a hurry. He bowed his head to kiss his lover's neck and ears, as his rubbed back and forth on his chest muscles before pinching his nipples.

Finally, Xing Ming was comfortable, and he sat up a little, humming, "The next is also…"

Putting Xing Ming between him and the sofa, Yu Zhongye spread out his legs and penetrated him again.

"Cunning old fox--"

Yu Zhongye stopped him from moaning by kissing him on his lips. The kiss continued as he kept thrusting. He tasted Xing Ming's mouth, his saliva, and his breath, using his tongue to sweep around every corner and swirling around with passion. Fully losing himself in such a pleasure, Xing Ming cramped his two legs and forced Yu Zhongye to lean closer to him by holding onto his shoulder. There was little space left between the two of them.

The penetration was still slightly gentle at first, but after several thrusts, Yu Zhongye was fully turned on, grasped and pinched Xing Ming's butt and kept going on the deep penetrations. All the while he asked, "Ming-Ming, you want me, right?

Ming-Ming, you like me, right?”

The room was filled up by the moans as they both reached their climax.

The answer seemed obvious.

On the TV the three fat white men were singing, “*I love you so much, so much…*”

Bonus Chapter 4

Passion and Love

Yu Shao'ai spent the whole Lunar New Year at home and didn't have any plan to move even when the holiday came to an end. He always had a cozy space tucked away in the nightlife of the city, having his own way as a pub singer. It was a typical day when he finally returned home at eleven am. He took off his shoes and was just setting foot in the living room when he saw Xing Ming descending the stairs in a robe. Without tying the belt, Xing Ming appeared to have just thrown on a baggy robe which clearly belonged to that cunning old fox since it was completely ill-fitting.

Even though Xing Ming had already washed his face and brushed his teeth carefully, he didn't wake up enough to realize the collar of his robe was hanging open. The reddish kiss marks were scattered over his neck and chest on the fair white skin like red plums that were in full bloom against the stark snow, remarkable and captivating. It only took one glance for Yu Shao'ai to notice them. Even though Host Xing's crazy fans loved flattering him and praised him for being a handsome yet stoic man, his aura of frigidity was unmatched by any other creature in the world. No one would believe the fact that at home, he was such a shameless person beneath his mask.

Xing Ming wasn't keen on keeping himself in the spotlight by interacting with his fans, yet he still grabbed attention and his fanbase continued increasing in number especially after getting a wave of publicity from some marketing accounts on social media – he even had a global fanbase afterwards. Yu Shao'ai fixed his eyes on him carefully while complaining in silence. After noticing this man's slim, light-skinned legs as if frost had formed on his ripped body with well-proportioned muscles chiseled into shape, Yu Shao'ai felt extremely itchy from effectively checked him out twice. It absolutely was not an act of coveting his "step-mom" especially since it wasn't the first time, he'd seen Xing Ming's bare body. Let alone this time when he wasn't completely naked.

Xing Ming glanced over at him and quickly realized that he had exposed himself in front of Yu Shao'ai whose gaze was currently glued to him. After tidying his appearance by smoothing his collar, tying the robe, and bundling himself up tightly, he glared at him.

"Where's my dad? He's out this early? I just remembered, tomorrow is your birthday, isn't it?" Feeling inexplicably satisfied under that reproachful gaze, Yu Shao'ai smirked. "Two-timing even though he already has a lovely 'wife' at home, huh?"

"I don't know," Xing Ming replied calmly. Actually, since this couple was always occupied by work, they rarely thought about each other between morning and

evening, even though their "reunions" usually ended with intense sex. They'd both gotten used to that schedule.

Yu Zhongye had arranged a meeting with Tang Wan and both of them deliberately kept it a secret from Xing Ming.

Tang Wan had a rough time recently because the man she married was unfaithful. At first, she didn't believe the warnings from people around her, but then she'd caught that man in the act of embracing a young woman before leading her into a movie theater. She had personally witnessed it. Tang Wan wasn't a woman who became withered and dejected by an unfaithful man, nonetheless, she did feel a tide of resentment. As time moved forward it crept over her graceful face, leaving traces of wrinkles. Time flew by while slowly stealing her youth and beauty. *That was the grave truth.*

Humans were complex creatures – conflicting thoughts and emotions often churned inside them, and they tended to be forgetful in triumph, while quite nostalgic when they were down and out. At that time memories of her ex-husband crossed into Tang Wan's mind and images of her son inevitably followed. She yearned to reconcile with her son with support from Yu Zhongye.

Currently Yu Zhongye was sitting in a cafe across from Tang Wan and random people would occasionally cast strange glances at them. The cafe was mainly inhabited by young couples and lovers, so it was rare to meet see a pair like them, both of whom were in their forties and fifties, graceful and attractive. Although she was a little bit older than Yu Zhongye, Tang Wan dressed youthfully and so they still seemed like a real couple. However, the sheer emotional distance between the two was easy to see on their faces. They looked like they could have been old flames who hadn't seen each other for ages.

Tang Wan had chosen to meet at a classy open-air cafe that was on the top floor of a hotel. She loved the elegant style, ambiance, and solitude of this place where customers were provided with a great view of the city skyline and the river below. But this place was actually infamous for being the best location for a tryst. It was said that if there was an ongoing booty call between the lovers, an hourly rate hotel room was available downstairs.

This woman still looked beautiful except for some inconspicuous wrinkles etched under her eyes – though it was hard to tell if they were from age or tears. Evidently aware of the looks from people around them, she tried to defuse the situation with an unwitty joke, "I find it quite interesting. People take us for a married couple, but they'll never know the fact that my son is your lover…"

"Not *just* lover," Yu Zhongye stressed. Without a doubt, her lame joke flopped and even made her sound pretty flighty. For Xing Ming's sake, Yu Zhongye smiled at her politely and indifferently, "I'll take Ming-Ming with me to America to get married immediately if he agrees."

His words greatly surprised Tang Wan, who felt more relieved at seeing Yu Zhongye speaking with certainty. "Ming-Ming has always been a stubborn and sometimes even willful child ever since he was little because of the problems in our family. Please Chairman Yu, I hope you can forgive him for his moodiness and take

good care of him."

"I know his grievances and how he suffered during his childhood. That's why I will make it up for him by loving him more." Yu Zhongye replied with a nod.

Stunned by his answer, Tang Wan nodded and took a sip of her coffee, saying, "That's a weight off my mind."

Hanging her head while unconsciously stirring her coffee, Tang Wan floundered – she was seeking help from Yu Zhongye but was too shy to bring it up. Their conversation almost slipped into an awkward silence, but unlike her, Yu Zhongye didn't pretend to be condescending all the time. He said with an aura of smile, "Ming-Ming definitely resembles you. Both of you are charming people."

"I have an idea… but it's hard for me to tell you…" She stuttered. Strangely, Tang Wan felt slightly awkward talking to Yu Zhongye and it nearly made her wince. She had rarely looked so awkward when speaking to men before. But this time, she dared not treat this man in front of her as a junior even though she was older than him. He wasn't one of those types of men she used to show off her charisma toward in the past and neither was he a young person whom she could face by exalting herself like a peacock. All because this man was her son's lover.

"Want to see Ming-Ming?" Yu Zhongye inquired. After seeing her nod, he broke into a smile. "As his mother, you can meet him at any time."

"But he doesn't want to see me…" With her head lowered, Tang Wan seemed to be in a dilemma. She explained, "I'm not a very good mother."

"Ming-Ming has grown up." Yu Zhongye replied in a considerate manner. "If you really want to see him, I can arrange it for you," he added, trying to take the load off her mind out of kindness.

Their meeting ended soon after since they had little to talk about except for a few things about Xing Ming. However, Tang Wan knew almost nothing about her son, while Yu Zhongye had no plans to share the life of his dear lover with anyone. They both left right after high tea without inviting each other for dinner. Later Yu Zhongye told his driver to give Tang Wan a lift back to her residence. It was just about time for dinner when he arrived home.

"I plan to bring someone home during the weekend." Yu Shao'ai said at the dinner table.

Speaking of the musical talent show, Yu Shao'ai had ranked fourth. The champion was a folk singer capable of singing old songs that evoked strong emotions and he'd played his cards well. Yu Shao'ai lost the competition to him and failed to get into the top three in the end, but that man's lopsided victory really impressed him. Without complaints, Yu Shao'ai decided to organize his own band rather than signing contracts with any record companies after the competition. He received a job to be a bar entertainer three days per week and spent the other days taking music classes in training companies in order to gain more experience.

Bonus Chapter 5

A Fresh Start

Host Xing was recently experiencing good luck. After turning down Gao Lian, the classmate who'd had a crush on him for many years, he'd managed to usher in a big-shot lawyer. *Oriental TV Line* had always used the format of inviting guest experts and legal professions on stage for live news debates. In the past, the resident lawyer they invited was Fu Yunxian, known to be the first-person criminal lawyer in China. Recently, he had privately turned down the invitation and it was rumored that he felt the program was boring and had asked his brother to replace him in order to preserve Pearl Station's reputation.

Xing Ming had clearly lost Fu Yunxian and was upset about the situation. *Oriental TV Line* was one of the few news programs that dared to speak out but, in the end, it was still the mouthpiece of the Party and government, so it was impossible to be completely unrestrained and say whatever they wanted. As such, Xing Ming invited the new guest lawyer for a private dinner to find out his opinion on the program.

Although this lawyer had the same surname, Fu, the temperaments of the two brothers were completely different. Fu Yunxian was the "black boss," while his younger brother was a typical rich man, elegant with exquisite manners. Xing Ming's first impression of Fu Yuzhi was good but after the meal, the atmosphere between the two became tense.

The cause was of course Xing Ming. Fu Yuzhi had fallen in love with him at first sight.

Xing Ming displaying his wedding ring also hadn't worked since the other party already decided to pursue him through hell or high water. He not only greeted Xing Ming every day at the entrance of Pearl Station Garden but also sent flowers. Sending flowers sent a very clear, vulgar message since the target should be limited to women and soon everyone knew about it. Although his relationship between him and Yu Zhongye wasn't a secret at the Station, Xing Ming still didn't want to come out publicly. In desperation, Xing Ming asked Fu Yuzhi if he could talk to him after the live broadcast. Once the show was over, Xing Ming informed the man that he was in a relationship and was not interested in being pursued or receiving flowers.

"You know, those flowers weren't really meant for you." Fu Yuzhi smiled brazenly and said, "That was a challenge. If your partner doesn't respond, then you should let them know that you're still on the market because you deserve better."

When he said it like that, it was impossible to stay angry regardless of whether he was lying or telling the truth. Moreover, Xing Ming still needed him to appear on the program and so he reluctantly allowed the other party to continue pursuing him. To be fair, Fu Yuzhi was not inferior to Yu Zhongye in terms of appearance and although he was young, he was knowledgeable and could hold good conversations.

Due to all the “bees buzzing around” gossip quickly spread, and Yu Zhongye figured out the situation.

Yu Zhongye’s response was very direct. *Oriental TV Line* changed its guest lawyer, but Xing Ming didn’t think that decision was appropriate. Although there were lawyers all over the city, Fu Yuzhi was unique. He was articulate and handsome enough to trigger hot online discussions every time he made an appearance. Overall, he helped get the show good ratings.

The two men fought over it although just saying they quarreled wouldn’t have been accurate. Boss Yu was completely unmoved while Xing Ming lost his temper and began ignoring him. Not long after the fight, Fu Yuzhi came to apologize for causing problems and recommended another lawyer to replace him as a guest. From his behavior, Xing Ming guessed that Yu Zhongye and Fu Yunxian knew each other. He speculated that the other lawyer probably directly spoke with his brother.

At this time, things at work weren’t going well. *Oriental TV Line’s* newest episode featuring drug substitution was taken down at the last moments before broadcast by the editor-in-chief’s office because someone in the army told them it shouldn’t be aired.

Then at the class reunion, Gao Lian had given Xing Ming a drug. Afterwards, he was very remorseful and apologized to the host no less than ten times. To Xing Ming, it didn’t matter, Gao Lian was just a passing acquaintance to him, and that incident hadn’t left any major impact— although that cunning old fox did retain a weird fetish since that night. Occasionally the man would make him undress and put in that fox tail. Yu Zhongye wouldn’t do anything but watch.

Since then, Gao Lian had thought of a way to make it up to Xing Ming. He’d brought the host to a military hospital he was familiar with and let him film a special program that would feature the interest chain in drug pricing. While Xing Ming hadn’t asked for it, he was glad for the opportunity. Previously he tried to send undercover reporters to get the information, but they didn’t even come close to entering through the door. This time with an insider’s help, Xing Ming captured a lot of precious footage. Medical representatives gave the directors of each department red envelopes while the patients’ families and friends also sent kickbacks to the head nurse. The head nurse of the department was supposedly the wife of the first sergeant, who owned several mansions, and she opened the backdoor of the hospital for expert treatment. She shared split bribes with the nurses and treated the patients associated with them much better than others. For the ones who offered money, gifts, and objects she spoke kindly and always smiled. She did not even bother to look at those who didn’t offer anything. Reporters secretly took photos of her distributing the bribes and kickbacks to the other nurses. In her hands were thick stacks of shopping cards, more than ten, and she handed them out like she was playing cards.

These photos were undisputable evidence. Local hospitals never dared to behave like that, but the military hospital had no direct supervision. Xing Ming had just finished making the short film when word spread to the relevant party’s ears. Heavy negotiations and layer upon layer of pressure stacked up, until right before the live broadcast, at which point Xing Ming received notice that the feature program was

not to be aired. Caught off guard and incredulous, the host lost his temper and went straight to the editor-in-chief's office to argue with his boss. Someone else had also taken the content and uploaded it onto the Internet. Due to the intensifying situation, *Oriental TV Line* had two of its feature episodes banned from airing by the editor-in-chief's office as part of program content rectification.

The new chairman greeted him but didn't ask Xing Ming to stop broadcasting. Instead, he asked the host to remove the sensitive material and re-broadcast the episodes. Xing Ming bluntly replied, "How would I do that? Each frame is important and directly relates to the next part of the video. We might as well remove the entire episode."

In an attempt to persuade him, the new chairman reminded Xing Ming that *Oriental TV Line* had still received many awards in the past two years, partially due to Pearl Station's efforts.

Xing Ming was speechless though really wasn't the first time he had compromised on the content of a show. He used to be a cub that was brave and willing to challenge the status quo but now he carried his own honor and was bound to become one of them. Xing Ming's temper flared again and in order to avoid bringing the issue to Yu Zhongye and causing unnecessary arguments, he decided to try to edit the video, packed a bag of luggage, and stay overnight at Pearl Station.

Editor Wang had also used Pearl Station as a second home in the past, but it was because he worked really hard. In Xing Ming's case, he was extremely angry. He didn't actually sleep at the station but stayed in a hotel near Pearl Garden.

At eight o'clock in the evening, the broadcasting building lit up with neon lights right on time. Like a huge column of light, it stayed brightly lit for a while and contrasted with the dim stars and the darkness of the night.

Xing Ming stood by the window, looking out, as his face soaked in the night air. He had just gotten back from a military hospital where he spent the day taking interviews for new content. At one point he'd almost been discovered. Thinking quickly, a cafeteria worker had dumped work clothes over his body as a cover and just acted like he was talking to himself while others walked past.

Xing Ming's assistant, Xiao He, knocked on the door to remind him that today was a special day.

It was only after that reminder that Xing Ming remembered today was Yu Zhongye's birthday.

Xing Ming wasn't an attentive person. He didn't remember what day or time he began tempting that old fox's heart. Maybe it was like ice slowly melting into water, integrating into each other but ordinary days always needed new things to spice them up. A few weeks ago, he'd asked his assistant to write a reminder about Yu Zhongye's birthday since he counted it as their anniversary. He was afraid that if he got too busy, he wouldn't remember an important event like that since it would just be thrown to the back of his mind.

Xing Ming thanked Xiao He for the reminder and went back to work.

Standing by the window for a long time, Xing Ming remembered that he shouldn't bring his mood from work back home. On such a day, he needed to choose whether to stay or go home.

Xing Ming called a Western restaurant where the two often had dinner and ordered a meal. He had prepared his gift early, an 82-year-old bottle of Lafite. Neither of them were alcoholics but if it hadn't been for that bottle of Lafite that shattered on Ol' Chen's head, they never would have gotten to this stage of their lives. For them, the Lafite held a deeper meaning beyond being a famous wine. On the way back, Xing Ming passed a florist. He stopped, got out of the car, and selected a bunch of roses. Xing Ming was still wearing his professional host suit when he was going to make his purchase. Seeing that handsome figure in a suit made the proprietress of the flower shop comment that Xing Ming's girlfriend must be very blessed.

Once he parked in the underground garage, Xing Ming reviewed his work in the small space. When he'd first moved out Yu Zhongye had called him, but in a fit of anger he didn't answer. After two to three more attempts, Yu Zhongye stopped calling. It made no sense to turn his back on stranger or loved ones.

He opened the door and Phoebe was already gone. The living room's lights weren't turned on but there were little yellow lights in the dining room. Maybe candles had already been lit.

There was a slightly sweet aroma hanging in the air and the scene at the table somehow seemed like colorful blur between space and time. The haze of the past few days seemed to have swept away and as Xing Ming stared at the wine bottle in his hand, he unconsciously smiled. He and that old fox possessed a tacit understanding. Yu Zhongye would definitely be back today.

Before he approached the table, he suddenly heard the sound of two men talking in the dining room. Both of the voices were very familiar. It took Xing Ming half a minute to react because in addition to Yu Zhongye there was another voice, someone that he recognized.

Luo You.

With a click, the dining room's lights were turned on. Luo You probably heard the sound of Xing Ming entering the room, so he came over to meet him. With a smile, he said, "Xing Ming, it's been a long time."

The other man's face was especially beautiful, and he was one of the few people that could make Xing Ming feel stunned every time he met him. Xing Ming reluctantly nodded and said, "Indeed, it's been a long time."

Yu Zhongye's intentions were clear. He'd brought Luo You back today, not as a demonstration but as a punishment.

That old fox was so childish. Even though he understood the other man's intentions, it still made Xing Ming feel uncomfortable. Standing awkwardly in front of Luo You while holding a rose in his hand made him feel like a complete fool.

Bonus Chapter 6

Daily Lives

Their Daily Life 1

Xing Ming really loved Yu Zhongye's kisses.

Based on a psychosexual perspective, experts say a craving for erotic kissing means the desire for libido which is created during the oral stage. When a person deals with his frustrated wishes and demands for the emotions he once lacked, he prefers to gain satisfaction through his mouth. Despite the fact that he had to admit the absence of his father has led to some mental stress, Xing Ming always declined to comment on this theory. He just liked kissing Yu Zhongye, especially during the initial stages of their loving relationship. The close contact between their lips made him feel much more comfortable and safer than intercourse does.

At this moment, he was snuggled in Yu Zhongye's arms, bare naked, body to body, face to face. They'd just finished a long and deep kiss. Yu Zhongye's member was still buried inside Xing Ming's body, and he'd wrapped his arms around his shoulders and tensed his legs around the younger man's waist. He wanted to get even closer to him so that they'd be completely intertwined.

Before Yu Zhongye could start thrusting, Xing Ming made him stop by running his fingers against his back and finally slightly pressing down on his waist. This man had a great body and chiseled physique. It was so good that one can hardly imagine him to be a man in his forties.

"Still not the right time?" Yu Zhongye whispered in Xing Ming's ear. His low voice mixed with his heavy breathing, lingering in his ear like some muffled echoing moans. Lust ignited a fire inside him that almost burned his throat.

"Old fox, kiss me one more time." Xing Ming requested in an attempt to haggle. He had absolutely no idea how beautiful he looked when he was fully turned on. Xing Ming's eyes seemed to be outlined red— like he was about to weep and stutter in a quavering and deep nasal voice after being annoyed by someone. Just beautiful.

Unexpectedly, Yu Zhongye held himself back and only leaned down, running his lips over Xing Ming's eyes, the tip of his nose and his lips. He knew that when his dear Ming-Ming was feeling emotional each inch of his skin become an erogenous zone and would elicit heaps of pleasure. Each time Yu Zhongye touched him, the younger man would tightly hold onto his body, moaning and grunting, quivering in ecstasy.

It was raining buckets outside and the world seems to be like a canoe swaying in the midst of a raging storm.

"Dad, I'm back!"

Bonus Chapter 7

Interview with the Author

Q1: As an author, what was your original intention in creating *Lip and Sword*? (What was your inspiration in creating the story?)

A1: When I was young, I longed to become an "investigative reporter" for a career. My dream was fulfilled through the novel.

Q2: While writing *Lip and Sword*, why did you decide to create the two protagonists Xing Ming and Yu Zhongye? What was your deepest memory?

A2: I'm an age gap fan myself. I like the complex emotions of a teacher, father, and lover. With Xing Ming's passion and sense of justice, his youthfulness and his impulsiveness need a silent supporter and protector. He needs an older and more mature person like Yu Zhongye.

Q3: Adding to the original storyline, (if the world changed and the two hadn't met in the same way due to different circumstances), do you as the author have any other alternate universe ideas for the two protagonists of *Lip and Sword*?

A3: If Xing Hong had not been wrongfully killed, Host Xing would have grown up to be a gentle, sunny, and handsome young man. He would have studied medicine like he wanted, would have become a doctor, and would have lived one day at a time… Until one day, when he hears about an important person who was admitted to the hospital for a brain tumor. As the resident doctor, he gets an opportunity to meet with experts and there he meets Yu Zhongye, the chairman of Pearl Station.

At the moment the two pairs of eyes meet each other, Xing Ming would have an immediate thought: Where is Chairman Yu? Isn't this clearly Beautiful Yu? Meanwhile, Chairman Yu looking at Xing Ming's nametag, smiles, and says, "This Dr. Xiao Xing, I feel like I've seen you somewhere before…"

You see, two people who are destined to meet will always find each other.

Q4: Besides the two main characters, who is your favorite supporting character? Why?

A4: Yu Shao'ai because he's one of the sunniest and most positive characters in the book. If I'm remembering correctly, he's also the readers' favorite supporting character.

Q5: It has been a long time since *Lip and Sword* ended. Is there anything else the author would like to say during this interview?

A5: I have nothing else to add though I occasionally want to write about their daily lives. It makes me feel like they are also real people, living in some corner of

the world just like you and me.

Q6: Is there anything interesting you have to share about your writing process?

A6: No, writing is an excruciatingly painful process. To exaggerate, it's akin to "taking ten years to sharpen a sword" and infusing blood, sweat, and tears into it. It's pure effort and dedication, no fun at all.

Q7: What's the most valuable thing you gained after writing for so long?

A7: Readers. I treasure every reader who is willing to resonate with me.

Q8: Can you give us a teaser on stories you're currently writing or plan to write in the future?

A8: The second part of the Times trilogy. I'm working on realistic themes. I believe it will soon be available on screen.

Q9: You as an author have written so many books. Can I ask which one made you feel the most satisfaction? Which one made you feel the most regret?

A9: My most satisfying work is *Jump Generation* (the first part of the Times trilogy). It allowed me to see another opportunity for myself and helped me to enter a new stage of writing. For a mature author, it's easy to leave unnecessary things behind while wanting to keep the meaningful and profound. My most regrettable work is *Attempted Love*. I originally intended only to write an extra story, but looking back at it again, I feel a bit of pity. The criminal defense lawyer and prosecutor actually had a confrontation full of tension, and it deserved a more complex and vivid story.

Q10: Is there anything the author would like to express to overseas readers?

A10: I wish you all peace, prosperity, and happiness. I'm glad to have this opportunity to communicate with you in some way. If there is another opportunity, I'll see you in the next book.

-End-